

ON
RUNNING
AFTER
ONE'S
HAT

G. K. CHESTERTON

824 C52on (2)

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

Books will be issued only on presentation of proper library cards.

Unless labeled otherwise, books may be retained for four weeks. Borrowers finding books marked, defaced or mutilated are expected to report same at library desk; otherwise the last borrower will be held responsible for all imperfections discovered.

The card holder is responsible for all books drawn on this card.

Penalty for over-due books 2c a day plus cost of notices.

Lost cards and change of residence must be reported promptly.

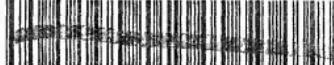


**Public Library
Kansas City, Mo.**

Keep Your Card in This Pocket

BERKOWITZ ENVELOPE CO., K. C., MO.

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1148 00918 2916

On Running After One's Hat

*On Running
After One's Hat*
and Other Whimsies

BY
G. K. CHESTERTON

SELECTED BY E. V. KNOX
EDITOR OF "PUNCH"

New York

McMXXXV

ROBERT, M. MC BRIDE & COMPANY

'~~GO~~ RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT

COPYRIGHT
BY DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

COPYRIGHT 1933
ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
OF AMERICA

FOURTH EDITION

Reprinted through the courtesy of
Dodd, Mead & Company
New York

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. ON RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT	I
II. ON LYING IN BED	7
III. CHEESE	13
IV. ON PHILOSOPHY VERSUS FICTION	18
V. THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE	25
VI. WHAT I FOUND IN MY POCKET	53
VII. THE PERFECT GAME	59
VIII. IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND	66
IX. A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE	72
X. THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING	78
XI. THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY	85
XII. THE THREE KINDS OF MEN	92
XIII. THE SURRENDER OF A COCKNEY	99
XIV. THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING	105
XV. HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN	112
XVI. THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY	118
XVII. THE METHUSELAHITE	125
XVIII. ON THE ENGLISHMAN ABROAD	130
XIX. ON CHANGE	138
XX. A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY	143

I. ON RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT

I FEEL an almost savage envy on hearing that London has been flooded in my absence, while I am in the mere country. My own Battersea has been, I understand, particularly favoured as a meeting of the waters. Battersea was already, as I need hardly say, the most beautiful of human localities. Now that it has the additional splendour of great sheets of water, there must be something quite incomparable in the landscape (or waterscape) of my own romantic town. Battersea must be a vision of Venice. The boat that brought the meat from the butcher's must have shot along those lanes of rippling silver with the strange smoothness of the gondola. The greengrocer who brought cabbages to the corner of the Latchmere Road must have leant upon the oar with the unearthly grace of the gondolier. There is nothing so perfectly poetical as an island; and when a district is flooded it becomes an archipelago.

Some consider such romantic views of flood or fire slightly lacking in reality. But really this romantic view of such inconveniences is quite as practical as the other. The true optimist

who sees in such things an opportunity for enjoyment is quite as logical and much more sensible than the ordinary ‘Indignant Ratepayer’ who sees in them an opportunity for grumbling. Real pain, as in the case of being burnt at Smithfield or having a toothache, is a positive thing ; it can be supported, but scarcely enjoyed. But, after all, our toothaches are the exception, and as for being burnt at Smithfield, it only happens to us at the very longest intervals. And most of the inconveniences that make men swear or women cry are really sentimental or imaginative inconveniences—things altogether of the mind. For instance, we often hear grown-up people complaining of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train. Did you ever hear a small boy complain of having to hang about a railway station, and wait for a train ? No ; for to him to be inside a railway station is to be inside a cavern of wonder and a palace of poetical pleasures. Because to him the red light and the green light on the signal are like a new sun and a new moon. Because to him when the wooden arm of the signal falls down suddenly, it is as if a great king had thrown down his staff as a signal and started a shrieking tournament of trains. I myself am of little boys’ habit in this matter. They also serve who

ON RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT

only stand and wait for the two fifteen. Their meditations may be full of rich and fruitful things. Many of the most purple hours of my life have been passed at Clapham Junction, which is now, I suppose, under water. I have been there in many moods so fixed and mystical that the water might well have come up to my waist before I noticed it particularly. But in the case of all such annoyances, as I have said, everything depends upon the emotional point of view. You can safely apply the test to almost every one of the things that are currently talked of as the typical nuisance of daily life.

For instance, there is a current impression that it is unpleasant to have to run after one's hat. Why should it be unpleasant to the well-ordered and pious mind? Not merely because it is running, and running exhausts one. The same people run much faster in games and sports. The same people run much more eagerly after an uninteresting little leather ball than they will after a nice silk hat. There is an idea that it is humiliating to run after one's hat; and when people say it is humiliating they mean that it is comic. It certainly is comic; but man is a very comic creature, and most of the things he does are comic—eating, for instance. And the most comic things of all are exactly the things that are most worth

G. K. CHESTERTON

doing—such as making love. A man running after a hat is not half so ridiculous as a man running after a wife.

Now a man could, if he felt rightly in the matter, run after his hat with the manliest ardour and the most sacred joy. He might regard himself as a jolly huntsman pursuing a wild animal, for certainly no animal could be wilder. In fact, I am inclined to believe that hat-hunting on windy days will be the sport of the upper classes in the future. There will be a meet of ladies and gentlemen on some high ground on a gusty morning. They will be told that the professional attendants have started a hat in such-and-such a thicket, or whatever be the technical term. Notice that this employment will in the fullest degree combine sport with humanitarianism. The hunters would feel that they were not inflicting pain. Nay, they would feel that they were inflicting pleasure, rich, almost riotous pleasure, upon the people who were looking on. When last I saw an old gentleman running after his hat in Hyde Park, I told him that a heart so benevolent as his ought to be filled with peace and thanks at the thought of how much unaffected pleasure his every gesture and bodily attitude were at that moment giving to the crowd.

The same principle can be applied to every

ON RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT

other typical domestic worry. A gentleman trying to get a fly out of the milk or a piece of cork out of his glass of wine often imagines himself to be irritated. Let him think for a moment of the patience of anglers sitting by dark pools, and let his soul be immediately irradiated with gratification and repose. Again, I have known some people of very modern views driven by their distress to the use of theological terms to which they attached no doctrinal significance, merely because a drawer was jammed tight and they could not pull it out. A friend of mine was particularly afflicted in this way. Every day his drawer was jammed, and every day in consequence it was something else that rhymes to it. But I pointed out to him that this sense of wrong was really subjective and relative ; it rested entirely upon the assumption that the drawer could, should, and would come out easily. ‘But if,’ I said, ‘you picture to yourself that you are pulling against some powerful and oppressive enemy, the struggle will become merely exciting and not exasperating. Imagine that you are tugging up a lifeboat out of the sea. Imagine that you are roping up a fellow-creature out of an Alpine crevass. Imagine even that you are a boy again and engaged in a tug-of-war between French and English.’ Shortly after saying this

I left him ; but I have no doubt at all that my words bore the best possible fruit. I have no doubt that every day of his life he hangs on to the handle of that drawer with a flushed face and eyes bright with battle, uttering encouraging shouts to himself, and seeming to hear all round him the roar of an applauding ring.

So I do not think that it is altogether fanciful or incredible to suppose that even the floods in London may be accepted and enjoyed poetically. Nothing beyond inconvenience seems really to have been caused by them ; and inconvenience, as I have said, is only one aspect, and that the most unimaginative and accidental aspect of a really romantic situation. An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. The water that girdled the houses and shops of London must, if anything, have only increased their previous witchery and wonder. For as the Roman Catholic priest in the story said : ‘ Wine is good with everything except water,’ and on a similar principle, water is good with everything except wine.

II. ON LYING IN BED

LYING in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling. This, however, is not generally a part of the domestic apparatus on the premises. I think myself that the thing might be managed with several pails of Aspinall and a broom. Only if one worked in a really sweeping and masterly way, and laid on the colour in great washes, it might drip down again on one's face in floods of rich and mingled colour like some strange fairy rain ; and that would have its disadvantages. I am afraid it would be necessary to stick to black and white in this form of artistic composition. To that purpose, indeed, the white ceiling would be of the greatest possible use ; in fact, it is the only use I think of a white ceiling being put to.

But for the beautiful experiment of lying in bed I might never have discovered it. For years I have been looking for some blank spaces in a modern house to draw on. Paper is much too small for any really allegorical design ; as Cyrano de Bergerac says : ‘ Il me faut des géants.’ But when I tried to find these fine

G. K. CHESTERTON

clear spaces in the modern rooms such as we all live in I was continually disappointed. I found an endless pattern and complication of small objects hung like a curtain of fine links between me and my desire. I examined the walls ; I found them to my surprise to be already covered with wall-paper, and I found the wall-paper to be already covered with very uninteresting images, all bearing a ridiculous resemblance to each other. I could not understand why one arbitrary symbol (a symbol apparently entirely devoid of any religious or philosophical significance) should thus be sprinkled all over my nice walls like a sort of small-pox. The Bible must be referring to wall-papers, I think, when it says, ‘Use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do.’ I found the Turkey carpet a mass of unmeaning colours, rather like the Turkish Empire, or like the sweetmeat called Turkish Delight. I do not exactly know what Turkish Delight really is ; but I suppose it is Macedonian Massacres. Everywhere that I went forlornly, with my pencil or my paint brush, I found that others had unaccountably been before me, spoiling the walls, the curtains, and the furniture with their childish and barbaric designs.

ON LYING IN BED

Nowhere did I find a really clear space for sketching until occasion when I prolonged beyond the proper limit the process of lying on my back in bed. Then the light of that white heaven broke upon my vision, that breadth of mere white which is indeed almost the definition of Paradise, since it means purity and also means freedom. But alas ! like all heavens now that it is seen it is found to be unattainable ; it looks more austere and more distant than the blue sky outside the window. For my proposal to paint on it with the bristly end of a broom has been discouraged—never mind by whom ; by a person debarred from all political rights—and even my minor proposal to put the other end of the broom into the kitchen fire and turn it into charcoal has not been conceded. Yet I am certain that it was from persons in my position that all the original inspiration came for covering the ceilings of palaces and cathedrals with a riot of fallen angels or victorious gods. I am sure that it was only because Michael Angelo was engaged in the ancient and honourable occupation of lying in bed that he ever realized how the roof of the Sistine Chapel might be made into an awful imitation of a divine drama that could only be acted in the heavens.

The tone now commonly taken towards the

G. K. CHESTERTON

practice of lying in bed is hypocritical and unhealthy. Of all the marks of modernity that seem to mean a kind of decadence, there is none more menacing and dangerous than the exaltation of very small and secondary matters of conduct at the expense of very great and primary ones, at the expense of eternal ties and tragic human morality. If there is one thing worse than the modern weakening of major morals it is the modern strengthening of minor morals. Thus it is considered more withering to accuse a man of bad taste than of bad ethics. Cleanliness is not next to godliness nowadays, for cleanliness is made an essential and godliness is regarded as an offence. A playwright can attack the institution of marriage so long as he does not misrepresent the manners of society, and I have met Ibsenite pessimists who thought it wrong to take beer but right to take prussic acid. Especially this is so in matters of hygiene ; notably such matters as lying in bed. Instead of being regarded, as it ought to be, as a matter of personal convenience and adjustment, it has come to be regarded by many as if it were a part of essential morals to get up early in the morning. It is, upon the whole, part of practical wisdom ; but there is nothing good about it or bad about its opposite.

ON LYING IN BED

Misers get up early in the morning ; and burglars, I am informed, get up the night before. It is the great peril of our society that all its mechanism may grow more fixed while its spirit grows more fickle. A man's minor actions and arrangements ought to be free, flexible, creative ; the things that should be unchangeable are his principles, his ideals. But with us the reverse is true ; our views change constantly ; but our lunch does not change. Now, I should like men to have strong and rooted conceptions, but as for their lunch, let them have it sometimes in the garden, sometimes in bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in the top of a tree. Let them argue from the same first principles, but let them do it in a bed, or a boat, or a balloon. This alarming growth of good habits really means a too great emphasis on those virtues which mere custom can ensure ; it means too little emphasis on those virtues which custom can never quite ensure, sudden and splendid virtues of inspired pity or of inspired candour. If ever that abrupt appeal is made to us we may fail. A man can get used to getting up at five o'clock in the morning. A man cannot very well get used to being burnt for his opinions ; the first experiment is commonly fatal. Let us pay a little more attention to these possibilities of the

G. K. CHESTERTON

heroic and the unexpected. I dare say that when I get out of this bed I shall do some deed of an almost terrible virtue.

For those who study the great art of lying in bed there is one emphatic caution to be added. Even for those who can do their work in bed (like journalists), still more for those whose work cannot be done in bed (as, for example, the professional harpooners of whales), it is obvious that the indulgence must be very occasional. But that is not the caution I mean. The caution is this : if you do lie in bed, be sure you do it without any reason or justification at all. I do not speak, of course, of the seriously sick. But if a healthy man lies in bed, let him do it without a rag of excuse ; then he will get up a healthy man. If he does it for some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation he may get up a hypochondriac.

III. CHEESE

MY forthcoming work in five volumes, 'The Neglect of Cheese in European Literature,' is a work of such unprecedented and laborious detail that it is doubtful if I shall live to finish it. Some overflowings from such a fountain of information may therefore be permitted to spangle these pages. I cannot yet wholly explain the neglect to which I refer. Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese. Virgil, if I remember right, refers to it several times, but with too much Roman restraint. He does not let himself go on cheese. The only other poet I can think of just now who seems to have had some sensibility on the point was the nameless author of the nursery rhyme which says : ' If all the trees were bread and cheese '—which is, indeed, a rich and gigantic vision of the higher gluttony. If all the trees were bread and cheese there would be considerable deforestation in any part of England where I was living. Wild and wide woodlands would reel and fade before me as rapidly as they ran after Orpheus. Except Virgil and this anonymous rhymer, I can recall no verse about cheese. Yet it has every quality

which we require in exalted poetry. It is a short, strong word ; it rhymes to ‘breeze’ and ‘seas’ (an essential point) ; that it is emphatic in sound is admitted even by the civilization of the modern cities. For their citizens, with no apparent intention except emphasis, will often say, ‘Cheese it !’ or even ‘Quite the cheese.’ The substance itself is imaginative. It is ancient—sometimes in the individual case, always in the type and custom. It is simple, being directly derived from milk, which is one of the ancestral drinks, not lightly to be corrupted with soda-water. You know, I hope (though I myself have only just thought of it), that the four rivers of Eden were milk, water, wine, and ale. Aerated waters only appeared after the Fall.

But cheese has another quality, which is also the very soul of song. Once in endeavouring to lecture in several places at once, I made an eccentric journey across England, a journey of so irregular and even illogical shape that it necessitated my having lunch on four successive days in four roadside inns in four different counties. In each inn they had nothing but bread and cheese ; nor can I imagine why a man should want more than bread and cheese, if he can get enough of it. In each inn the cheese was good ; and in each inn it was

CHEESE

different. There was a noble Wensleydale cheese in Yorkshire, a Cheshire cheese in Cheshire, and so on. Now, it is just here that true poetic civilization differs from that paltry and mechanical civilization which holds us all in bondage. Bad customs are universal and rigid, like modern militarism. Good customs are universal and varied, like native chivalry and self-defence. Both the good and bad civilization cover us as with a canopy, and protect us from all that is outside. But a good civilization spreads over us freely like a tree, varying and yielding because it is alive. A bad civilization stands up and sticks out above us like an umbrella—artificial, mathematical in shape ; not merely universal, but uniform. So it is with the contrast between the substances that vary and the substances that are the same wherever they penetrate. By a wise doom of heaven men were commanded to eat cheese, but not the same cheese. Being really universal it varies from valley to valley. But if, let us say, we compare cheese with soap (that vastly inferior substance), we shall see that soap tends more and more to be merely Smith's Soap or Brown's Soap, sent automatically all over the world. If the Red Indians have soap it is Smith's Soap. If the Grand Lama has soap it is Brown's Soap. There is nothing subtly and

strangely Buddhist, nothing tenderly Tibetan, about his soap. I fancy the Grand Lama does not eat cheese (he is not worthy), but if he does it is probably a local cheese, having some real relation to his life and outlook. Safety matches, tinned foods, patent medicines are sent all over the world ; but they are not produced all over the world. Therefore there is in them a mere dead identity, never that soft play of slight variation which exists in things produced everywhere out of the soil, in the milk of the kine, or the fruits of the orchard. You can get a whisky and soda at every outpost of the Empire : that is why so many Empire-builders go mad. But you are not tasting or touching any environment, as in the cider of Devonshire or the grapes of the Rhine. You are not approaching Nature in one of her myriad tints of mood, as in the holy act of eating cheese.

When I had done my pilgrimage in the four wayside public-houses I reached one of the great northern cities, and there I proceeded, with great rapidity and complete inconsistency, to a large and elaborate restaurant, where I knew I could get many other things besides bread and cheese. I could get that also, however ; or at least I expected to get it ; but I was sharply reminded that I had entered

CHEESE

Babylon, and left England behind. The waiter brought me cheese, indeed, but cheese cut up into contemptibly small pieces ; and it is the awful fact that, instead of Christian bread, he brought me biscuits. Biscuits—to one who had eaten the cheese of four great countrysides ! Biscuits—to one who had proved anew for himself the sanctity of the ancient wedding between cheese and bread ! I addressed the waiter in warm and moving terms. I asked him who he was that he should put asunder those whom Humanity had joined. I asked him if he did not feel, as an artist, that a solid but yielding substance like cheese went naturally with a solid, yielding substance like bread ; to eat it off biscuits is like eating it off slates. I asked him, if when he said his prayers, he was so supercilious as to pray for his daily biscuits. He gave me generally to understand that he was only obeying a custom of Modern Society. I have therefore resolved to raise my voice, not against the waiter, but against Modern Society, for this huge and unparalleled modern wrong.

IV. ON PHILOSOPHY VERSUS FICTION

LOOKING back on a wild and wasted life, I realize that I have especially sinned in neglecting to read novels. I mean the really novel novels ; for such old lumber as Dickens and Jane Austen I know fairly well. If instead of trifling away my time over pamphlets about Collectivism or Co-operation, plunging for mere pleasure into the unhealthy excitement of theological debates with dons, or enjoying the empty mirth of statistics about Poland and Czechoslovakia, I had quietly sat at home doing my duty and reading every novel as it comes out, I might be a more serious and earnest man than I am to-day. If instead of loitering to laugh over something, merely because it happened to be laughable, I had walked stiffly and sternly on to the Circulating Library, and put myself under the tuition of our more passionate lady novelists, I might by this time be as intense as they. If instead of leading a riotous life, scrapping with Mr. Shaw about Socialism, or Dean Inge about Science, I had believed everything I was told about marriage by an unmarried young woman in an avowedly imaginary story, I might now have

ON PHILOSOPHY VERSUS FICTION

a more undisturbed faith and simplicity. Novels are the great monument of the amazing credulity of the modern mind ; for people believe them quite seriously even though they do not pretend to be true.

But it is really true, alas ! that I have failed to follow adequately the development of serious fiction. I do not admit that I have entirely failed to follow the development of serious facts. Not only have I discussed Labour with Socialists, or Science with Scientists, but I have argued with myself about other things, so new and true that I cannot get anybody else to argue about them. The world-wide power of trusts, for instance, is a thing that is never attacked and never defended. It seems to have been completed without ever having been proposed ; we might say without ever having been begun. The small shopkeeper has been destroyed in the twentieth century, as the small yeoman was destroyed in the eighteenth century. But for the yeoman there was protest and regret ; great poets sang his dirge, and great orators like Cobbett died trying to avenge his death. But the modern destructive changes seem to be too new to be noticed. Perhaps they are too enormous to be seen. No ; I do not think it can be fairly said that I have neglected the most recent realities of the real

world. It seems rather the real world that neglects them.

Nor do I confess, thank heaven, to the more odious vice of neglecting funny or frivolous fiction ; whether in the sense of reading everything from the first story of Mr. Jacobs to the last story of Mr. Wodehouse ; or in that richer sense in which the joke consists entirely of a corpse, a blood-stained hat-peg, or the mysterious footprints of a three-legged man in the garden. I have been a munificent patron of fiction of that description ; and have even presented the public with a corpse or two of my own. In short, the limitation of my literary experience is altogether on the side of the modern serious novel ; especially that very serious novel which is all about the psychology of flirting and jilting and going to jazz dances. I have read hundreds of books bearing titles like *Socialism : The Way Out* ; or *Society : the Way In* ; or *Japanese Light on the Paulus Mythus* ; or *Cannibalism the Clue to Catholicism* ; or *Parricide : a Contribution to Progress* ; or *The Traffic Problem : The Example of Greenland* ; or *Must We Drink ?* ; or *Should We Eat ?* ; or *Do We Breathe ?* and all those grave and baffling questions. I have also read hundreds of books bearing titles like *Who Killed Humphrey Higglewick ?* ; or *The Blood on the Blotting-paper* ; or

ON PHILOSOPHY VERSUS FICTION

The Secret of Piccadilly Circus; or *The Clue of the Stolen Toothbrush*; and so on and so on. But I have *not* read with sufficient regularity, diligence and piety all those other books that bear titles like *The Grasswidowhood of Grace Bellow*; or *The Seventh Honeymoon of Sylphide Squeak*; or *Dear Lady Divorce*; or *The Sex of Samuel Stubbin*; or *Harold Hatrack, Soul-Thief*; or *The Hypnotist of Insomnia Smith*. All these grave and laborious, and often carefully written books come out season after season; and somehow I have missed them. Sometimes they miss me, even when hurled at my head by publishers. It were vain to deny that I sometimes deliberately avoid them. I have a reason, of a reasonable sort; for I do not think it is a really reasonable reason merely to say that they bore me. For I did once really try to read them; and I got lost. One reason is that I think there is in all literature a sort of purpose; quite different from the mere moralizing that is generally meant by a novel with a purpose. There is something in the plan of the idea that is straight like a backbone and pointing like an arrow. It is meant to go somewhere, or at least to point somewhere; to its end, not only in the modern sense of an ending, but in the medieval sense of a fruition. Now, I think that many of the less intellectual stories have kept

this, where the more intellectual stories have lost it. The writer of detective stories, having once asked who killed Humphrey Higgleswick, must, after all, end by telling us who did it, even by the mean subterfuge of saying it was Humphrey Higgleswick. But the serious novelist asks a question that he does not answer ; often that he is really incompetent to answer. The sex of Samuel Stubbin may even remain in considerable doubt, in some of the more emotional passages, and the seventh honeymoon of Sylphide seems to have nothing to do with the probable prospect of her eighth. It is the custom of these writers to scoff at the old sentimental novel or novelette, in which the story always ended happily to the sound of church bells. But, judged by the highest standards of heroic or great literature, like the Greek tragedies or the great epics, the novelette was really far superior to the novel. It set itself to reach a certain goal—the marriage of two persons, with all its really vital culmination in the founding of a family and a vow to God ; and all other incidents were interesting because they pointed to a consummation which was, by legitimate hypothesis, a grand consummation.

But the modern refusal both of the religious vow and the romantic hope has broken the backbone of the business altogether, and it is

ON PHILOSOPHY VERSUS FICTION

only an assorted bag of bones. People are minutely described as experiencing one idiotic passion after another, passions which they themselves recognize as idiotic, and which even their own wretched philosophy forbids them to regard as steps towards any end. The sentimental novelette was a simplified and limited convention of the thing ; in which, for the sake of argument, marriage was made the prize. Of course marriage is not the only thing that happens in life ; and somebody else may study another section with another goal. But the modern serious novelists deny that there is any goal. They cannot point to the human happiness which the romantics associated with gaining the prize. They cannot point to the heavenly happiness which the religious associated with keeping the vow. They are driven back entirely on the microscopic description of these aimless appetites in themselves. And, microscopically studied in themselves, they are not very interesting to a middle-aged man with plenty of other things to think about. In short, the old literature, both great and trivial, was built on the idea that there is a purpose in life, even if it is not always completed in this life ; and it really was interesting to follow the stages of such a purpose ; from the meeting to the wedding, from the wedding to the bells, and

G. K. CHESTERTON

from the bells to the church. But modern philosophy has taken the life out of modern fiction. It is simply dissolving into separate fragments and then into formlessness ; and deserves much more than the romantic novel the modern reproach of being ‘ sloppy ’.

V. THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

FLAMBEAU and his friend the priest were sitting in the Temple Gardens about sunset ; and their neighbourhood or some such accidental influence had turned their talk to matters of legal process. From the problem of the licence in cross-examination, their talk strayed to Roman and medieval torture, to the examining magistrate in France and the Third Degree in America.

‘ I’ve been reading,’ said Flambeau, ‘ of this new psychometric method they talk about so much, especially in America. You know what I mean ; they put a pulsometer on a man’s wrist and judge by how his heart goes at the pronunciation of certain words. What do you think of it ? ’

‘ I think it very interesting,’ replied Father Brown ; ‘ it reminds me of that interesting idea in the Dark Ages that blood would flow from a corpse if the murderer touched it.’

‘ Do you really mean,’ demanded his friend, ‘ that you think the two methods equally valuable ? ’

‘ I think them equally valueless,’ replied Brown. ‘ Blood flows, fast or slow, in dead folk

or living, for so many more million reasons than we can ever know. Blood will have to flow very funnily ; blood will have to flow up the Matterhorn, before I will take it as a sign that I am to shed it.'

'The method,' remarked the other, 'has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science.'

'What sentimentalists men of science are !' exclaimed Father Brown, 'and how much more sentimental must American men of science be ! Who but a Yankee would think of proving anything from heart-throbs ? Why, they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That's a test from the circulation of the blood, discovered by the immortal Harvey ; and a jolly rotten test too.'

'But surely,' insisted Flambeau, 'it might point pretty straight at something or other.'

'There's a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight,' answered the other. 'What is it ? Why, at the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end. I saw the thing done once and I've never believed in it since.' And he proceeded to tell the story of his disillusionment.

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

It happened nearly twenty years before when he was chaplain to his co-religionists in a prison in Chicago—where the Irish population displayed a capacity both for crime and penitence which kept him tolerably busy. The official second-in-command under the Governor was an ex-detective named Greywood Usher, a cadaverous, careful-spoken Yankee philosopher, occasionally varying a very rigid visage with an odd apologetic grimace. He liked Father Brown in a slightly patronizing way ; and Father Brown liked him, though he heartily disliked his theories. His theories were extremely complicated and were held with extreme simplicity.

One evening he had sent for the priest, who, according to his custom, took a seat in silence at a table piled and littered with papers, and waited. The official selected from the papers a scrap of newspaper cutting, which he handed across to the cleric, who read it gravely. It appeared to be an extract from one of the pinkest of American Society papers, and ran as follows :

‘ Society’s brightest widower is once more on the Freak Dinner stunt. All our exclusive citizens will recall the Perambulator Parade Dinner, in which Last-Trick Todd, at his palatial home at Pilgrim’s Pond, caused so

many of our prominent *débutantes* to look even younger than their years. Equally elegant and more miscellaneous and large-hearted in social outlook was Last-Trick's show the year previous, the popular Cannibal Crush Lunch, at which the confections handed round were sarcastically moulded in the forms of human arms and legs, and during which more than one of our gayest mental gymnasts was heard offering to eat his partner. The witticism which will inspire this evening is as yet in Mr. Todd's pretty reticent intellect, or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders ; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the simple manners and customs at the other end of Society's scale. This would be all the more telling, as hospitable Todd is entertaining in Lord Falconroy, the famous traveller, a true-blooded aristocrat fresh from England's oak-groves. Lord Falconroy's travels began before his ancient feudal title was resurrected ; he was in the Republic in his youth, and fashion murmurs a sly reason for his return. Miss Etta Todd is one of our deep-souled New Yorkers and comes into an income of nearly twelve hundred million dollars.'

' Well,' asked Usher, ' does that interest you ? '

' Why, words rather fail me,' answered Father Brown. ' I cannot think at this moment

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

of anything in this world that would interest me less. And, unless the just anger of the Republic is at last going to electrocute journalists for writing like that, I don't quite see why it should interest you either.'

' Ah ! ' said Mr. Usher dryly, and handing across another scrap of newspaper. ' Well, does *that* interest you ? '

The paragraph was headed ' Savage Murder of a Warder. Convict Escapes ', and ran : ' Just before dawn this morning a shout for help was heard in the Convict Settlement at Sequah in this State. The authorities, hurrying in the direction of the cry, found the corpse of the warder who patrols the top of the north wall of the prison, the steepest and most difficult exit, for which one man has always been found sufficient. The unfortunate officer had, however, been hurled from the high wall, his brains beaten out as with a club ; and his gun was missing. Further inquiries showed that one of the cells was empty ; it had been occupied by a rather sullen ruffian giving his name as Oscar Rian. He was only temporarily detained for some comparatively trivial assault ; but he gave every one the impression of a man with a black past and a dangerous future. Finally, when daylight had fully revealed the scene of murder, it was found that he had written on

the wall above the body a fragmentary sentence, apparently with a finger dipped in blood : “ This was self-defence and he had the gun. I meant no harm to him or any man but one. I am keeping the bullet for Pilgrim’s Pond—O.R.” A man must have used most fiendish treachery or most savage and amazing bodily daring to have stormed such a wall, in spite of an armed man.’

‘ Well, the literary style is somewhat improved,’ admitted the priest cheerfully, ‘ but still I don’t see what I can do for you. I should cut a poor figure, with my short legs, running about this State after an athletic assassin of that sort. I doubt whether anybody could find him. The convict settlement at Sequah is thirty miles from here ; the country between is wild and tangled enough, and the country beyond, where he will surely have the sense to go, is a perfect no-man’s land tumbling away to the prairies. He may be in any hole or up any tree.’

‘ He isn’t in any hole,’ said the governor, ‘ he isn’t up any tree.’

‘ Why, how do you know ? ’ asked Father Brown, blinking.

‘ Would you like to speak to him ? ’ inquired Usher.

Father Brown opened his innocent eyes wide.

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

‘ He is here ? ’ he exclaimed. ‘ Why, how did your men get hold of him ? ’

‘ I got hold of him myself,’ drawled the American, rising and lazily stretching his lanky legs before the fire. ‘ I got hold of him with the crooked end of a walking-stick. Don’t look so surprised. I really did. You know I sometimes take a turn in the country lanes outside this dismal place ; well, I was walking early this evening up a steep lane with dark hedges and grey-looking ploughed fields on both sides ; and a young moon was up and silvering the road. By the light of it I saw a man running across the field towards the road ; running with his body bent and at a good mile-race trot. He appeared to be much exhausted ; but when he came to the thick black hedge he went through it as if it were made of spiders’ webs ; or rather (for I heard the strong branches breaking and snapping like bayonets) as if he himself were made of stone. In the instant in which he appeared up against the moon, crossing the road, I slung my hooked cane at his legs, tripping him and bringing him down. Then I blew my whistle long and loud, and our fellows came running up to secure him.’

‘ It would have been rather awkward,’ remarked Brown, ‘ if you had found he was a popular athlete practising a mile race.’

'He was not,' said Usher grimly. 'We soon found out who he was ; but I had guessed it with the first glint of the moon on him.'

'You thought it was the runaway convict,' observed the priest simply, 'because you had read in the newspaper cutting that morning that a convict had run away.'

'I had somewhat better grounds,' replied the governor coolly. 'I pass over the first as too simple to be emphasized—I mean that fashionable athletes do not run across ploughed fields or scratch their eyes out in bramble hedges. Nor do they run all doubled up like a crouching dog. There were more decisive details to a fairly well-trained eye. The man was clad in coarse and ragged clothes, but they were something more than merely coarse and ragged. They were so ill fitting as to be quite grotesque ; even as he appeared in black outline against the moonrise, the coat-collar in which his head was buried made him look like a hunchback, and the long loose sleeves looked as if he had no hands. It at once occurred to me that he had somehow managed to change his convict clothes for some confederates' clothes which did not fit him. Second, there was a pretty stiff wind against which he was running ; so that I must have seen the streaky look of blowing hair, if the hair had been very

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

short. Then I remembered that beyond these ploughed fields he was crossing lay Pilgrim's Pond, for which (you will remember) the convict was keeping his bullet ; and I sent my walking-stick flying.'

'A brilliant piece of rapid deduction,' said Father Brown, 'but had he got a gun ?'

As Usher stopped abruptly in his walk the priest added apologetically : 'I've been told a bullet is not half so useful without it.'

'He had no gun,' said the other gravely, 'but that was doubtless due to some very natural mischance or change of plans. Probably the same policy that made him change the clothes made him drop the gun ; he began to repent the coat he had left behind him in the blood of his victim.'

'Well, that is possible enough,' answered the priest.

'And it's hardly worth speculating on,' said Usher, turning to some other papers, 'for we know it's the man by this time.'

His clerical friend asked faintly, 'But how ?' and Greywood Usher threw down the newspapers and took up the two press-cuttings again.

'Well, since you are so obstinate,' he said, 'let's begin at the beginning. You will notice that these two cuttings have only one thing in

common, which is the mention of Pilgrim's Pond, the estate, as you know, of the millionaire Ireton Todd. You also know that he is a remarkable character ; one of those that rose on stepping-stones—

'Of our dead selves to higher things,' assented his companion. 'Yes ; I know that. Petroleum, I think.'

'Anyhow,' said Usher. 'Last-Trick Todd counts for a great deal in this rum affair.'

He stretched himself once more before the fire and continued talking in his expansive, radiantly explanatory style.

'To begin with, on the face of it, there is no mystery here at all. It is not mysterious, it is not even odd, that a jailbird should take his gun to Pilgrim's Pond. Our people aren't like the English, who all forgive a man for being rich if he throws away money on hospitals or horses. Last-Trick Todd has made himself big by his own considerable abilities ; and there's no doubt that many of those on whom he has shown his abilities would like to show theirs on him with a shot-gun. Todd might easily get dropped by some man he'd never even heard of ; some labourer he'd locked out, or some clerk in a business he'd busted. Last-Trick is a man of mental endowments and a high public character ; but in this country the

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

relations of employers and employed are considerably strained.

' That's how the whole thing looks supposing this Rian made for Pilgrim's Pond to kill Todd. So it looked to me till another little discovery woke up what I have of the detective in me. When I had my prisoner safe, I picked up my cane again and strolled down the two or three turns of country-road that brought me to one of the side entrances of Todd's grounds, the one nearest to the pool or lake after which the place is named. It was some two hours ago, about seven by this time ; the moonlight was more luminous, and I could see the long white streaks of it lying on the mysterious mere with its grey, greasy half-liquid shores in which they say our fathers used to make witches walk until they sank. I've forgotten the exact tale ; but you know the place I mean ; it lies north of Todd's house towards the wilderness, and has two queer wrinkled trees, so dismal that they look more like huge fungoids than decent foliage. As I stood peering at this misty pool, I fancied I saw the faint figure of a man moving from the house towards it, but it was all too dim and distant for one to be certain of the fact, and still less of the details. Besides, my attention was very sharply arrested by something much closer. I crouched behind the

fence, which ran not more than two hundred yards from one wing of the great mansion, and which was fortunately split in places, as if specially for the application of a cautious eye. A door had opened in the dark bulk of the left wing ; and a figure appeared black against the illuminated interior—a muffled figure bending forward, evidently peering out into the night. It closed the door behind it, and I saw it was carrying a lantern, which threw a patch of imperfect light on the dress and figure of the wearer. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, wrapped up in a ragged cloak and evidently disguised to avoid notice ; there was something very strange both about the rags and the furtiveness in a person coming out of those rooms lined with gold. She took cautiously the curved garden path which brought her within half a hundred yards of me ; then she stood up for an instant on the terrace of turf that looks towards the slimy lake, and holding her flaming lantern above her head she deliberately swung it three times to and fro as for a signal. As she swung it the second time a flicker of its light fell for a moment on her own face, a face that I knew. She was unnaturally pale, and her head was bundled in her borrowed plebeian shawl ; but I am certain it was Etta Todd, the millionaire's daughter.

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

‘ She retraced her steps in equal secrecy and the door closed behind her again. I was about to climb the fence and follow, when I realized that the detective fever that had lured me into the adventure was rather undignified ; and that in a more authoritative capacity I already held all the cards in my hand. I was just turning away, when a new noise broke on the night. A window was thrown up in one of the upper floors, but just round the corner of the house so that I could not see it ; and a voice of terrible distinctness was heard shouting across the dark garden to know where Lord Falconroy was, for he was missing from every room in the house. There was no mistaking that voice. I have heard it on many a political platform or meeting of directors ; it was Ireton Todd himself. Some of the others seemed to have gone to the lower windows or on to the steps, and were calling up to him that Falconroy had gone for a stroll down to the Pilgrim’s Pond an hour before, and could not be traced since. Then Todd cried “ Mighty Murder ! ” and shut down the window violently ; and I could hear him plunging down the stairs inside. Repossessing myself of my former and wiser purpose, I whipped out of the way of the general search that must follow ; and returned here not much later than eight o’clock.

' I now ask you to recall that little Society paragraph which seemed to you so painfully lacking in interest.. If the convict was not keeping the shot for Todd, as he evidently wasn't, it is most likely that he was keeping it for Lord Falconroy ; and it looks as if he had delivered the goods. No more handy place to shoot a man than in the curious geological surroundings of that pool, where a body thrown down would sink through thick slime to a depth practically unknown. Let us suppose, then, that our friend with the cropped hair came to kill Falconroy, and not Todd. But, as I have pointed out, there are many reasons why many people in America might want to kill Todd. There is no reason why anybody in America should want to kill an English lord newly landed, except for the one reason mentioned in the pink paper—that the lord is paying his attentions to the millionaire's daughter. Our crop-haired friend, despite his ill-fitting clothes, must be an aspiring lover.

' I know the notion will seem to you jarring and even comic ; but that's because you are English. It sounds to you like saying the Archbishop of Canterbury's daughter will be married in St. George's, Hanover Square, to a crossing-sweeper on ticket-of-leave. You don't do justice to the climbing and aspiring power

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

of our more remarkable citizens. You see a good-looking grey-haired man in evening dress with a sort of authority about him, you know he is a pillar of the State, and you fancy he had a father. You are in error. You do not realize that a comparatively few years ago he may have been in a tenement or (quite likely) in a jail. You don't fallow or our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential citizens have not only risen recently, but risen comparatively late in life: Todd's daughter was fully eighteen when her father first made his pile ; so there isn't really anything impossible in her having a hanger-on in low life ; or even in her hanging on to him, as I think she must be doing, to judge by the lantern business. If so, the hand that held the lantern may not be unconnected with the hand that held the gun. This case, sir, will make a noise.'

' Well,' said the priest patiently, ' and what did you do next ? '

' I reckon you'll be shocked,' replied Greywood Usher, ' as I know you don't cotton to the march of science in these matters. I am given a good deal of discretion here, and perhaps take a little more than I'm given ; and I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test that Psychometric Machine I told you about. Now, in my opinion that machine can't lie.'

G. K. CHESTERTON

‘No machine can lie,’ said Father Brown, ‘nor can it tell the truth.’

‘It did in this case, as I’ll show you,’ went on Usher positively. ‘I sat the man in the ill-fitting clothes in a comfortable chair, and simply wrote words on a blackboard ; and the machine simply recorded the variations of his pulse ; and I simply observed his manner. The trick is to introduce some word connected with the supposed crime in a list of words connected with something quite different, yet a list in which it occurs quite naturally. Thus I wrote “heron” and “eagle” and “owl”, and when I wrote “falcon” he was tremendously agitated ; and when I began to make an *r* at the end of the word, that machine just bounded. Who else in this republic has any reason to jump at the name of a newly arrived Englishman like Falconroy except the man who’s shot him ? Isn’t that better evidence than a lot of gabble from witnesses ; the evidence of a reliable machine.’

‘You always forget,’ observed his companion, ‘that the reliable machine always has to be worked by an unreliable machine.’

‘Why, what do you mean ?’ asked the detective.

‘I mean Man,’ said Father Brown, ‘the most unreliable machine I know of. I don’t

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

want to be rude ; and I don't think you will consider Man to be an offensive or inaccurate description of yourself. You say you observed his manner ; but how do you know you observed it right ? You say the words have to come in a natural way ; but how do you know that you did it naturally ? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner ? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated ? There was no machine tied on to your pulse.'

' I tell you,' cried the American in the utmost excitement, ' I was as cool as a cucumber.'

' Criminals also can be as cool as cucumbers,' said Brown with a smile. ' And almost as cool as you.'

' Well, this one wasn't,' said Usher, throwing the papers about. ' Oh, you make me tired ! '

' I'm sorry,' said the other. ' I only point out what seems a reasonable possibility. If you could tell by his manner when the word that might hang him had come, why shouldn't he tell from your manner that the word that might hang him was coming ? I should ask for more than words myself before I hanged anybody.'

Usher smote the table and rose in a sort of angry triumph.

' And that,' he cried, ' is just what I'm going

to give you. I tried the machine first just in order to test the thing in other ways afterwards ; and the machine, sir, is right.'

He paused a moment and resumed with less excitement. ' I rather want to insist, if it comes to that, that so far I had very little to go on except the scientific experiment. There was really nothing against the man at all. His clothes were ill-fitting, as I've said, but they were rather better, if anything, than those of the submerged class to which he evidently belonged. Moreover, under all the stains of his plunging through ploughed fields or bursting through dusty hedges, the man was comparatively clean. This might mean, of course, that he had only just broken prison ; but it reminded me more of the desperate decency of the comparatively respectable poor. His demeanour was, I am bound to confess, quite in accordance with theirs. He was silent and dignified as they are ; he seemed to have a big, but buried, grievance, as they do. He professed total ignorance of the crime and the whole question ; and showed nothing but a sullen impatience for something sensible that might come to take him out of his meaningless scrape. He asked me more than once if he could telephone for a lawyer who had helped him a long time ago in a trade dispute, and in

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

every sense acted as you would expect an innocent man to act. There was nothing against him in the world except that little finger on the dial that pointed to the change of his pulse.

‘ Then, sir, the machine was on its trial ; and the machine was right. By the time I came with him out of the private room into the vestibule where all sorts of other people were awaiting examination, I think he had already more or less made up his mind to clear things up by something like a confession. He turned to me, and began to say in a low voice : “ Oh, I can’t stick this any more. If you must know all about me——”

‘ At the same instant one of the poor women sitting on the long bench stood up, screaming aloud and pointing at him with her finger. I have never in my life heard anything more demoniacally distinct. Her lean finger seemed to pick him out as if it were a pea-shooter. Though the word was a mere howl, every syllable was as clear as a separate stroke on the clock.

‘ “ Drugger Davis ! ” she shouted. “ They’ve got Drugger Davis ! ”

‘ Among the wretched women, mostly thieves and street-walkers, twenty faces were turned, gaping with glee and hate. If I had never

heard the words, I should have known by the very shock upon his features that the so-called Oscar Rian had heard his real name. But I'm not quite so ignorant, you may be surprised to hear. Drugger Davis was one of the most terrible and depraved criminals that ever baffled our police. It is certain he had done murder more than once long before his last exploit with the warder. But he was never entirely fixed for it, curiously enough, because he did it in the same manner as those milder—or meaner—crimes for which he was fixed pretty often. He was a handsome, well-bred-looking brute, as he still is, to some extent ; and he used mostly to go about with barmaids or shop-girls and do them out of their money. Very often, though, he went a good deal farther ; and they were found drugged with cigarettes or chocolates and their whole property missing. Then came one case where the girl was found dead ; but deliberation could not quite be proved, and, what was more practical still, the criminal could not be found. I heard a rumour of his having reappeared somewhere in the opposite character this time, lending money instead of borrowing it ; but still to such poor widows as he might personally fascinate, and still with the same bad results for them. Well, there is your innocent man,

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

and there is his innocent record. Even since then four criminals and three warders have identified him and confirmed the story. Now what have you got to say to my poor little machine after that? Hasn't the machine done for him? Or do you prefer to say that the woman and I have done for him?'

'As to what you've done for him,' replied Father Brown, rising and shaking himself in a floppy way, 'you've saved him from the electrical chair. I don't think they can kill Drugger Davis on that old vague story of the poison; and as for the convict who killed the warder, I suppose it's obvious that you haven't got him. Mr. Davis is innocent of that crime, at any rate.'

'What do you mean?' demanded the other. 'Why should he be innocent of that crime?'

'Why, bless us all!' cried the small man in one of his rare moments of animation, 'why, because he's guilty of the other crimes! I don't know what you people are made of. You seem to think that all sins are kept together in a bag. You talk as if a miser on Monday were always a spendthrift on Tuesday. You tell me this man you have here spent weeks and months wheedling needy women out of small sums of money; that he used a drug at the best, and

a poison at the worst ; that he turned up afterwards as the lowest kind of moneylender, and cheated more poor people in the same patient and pacific style. Let it be granted—let us admit, for the sake of argument, that he did all this. If that is so, I will tell you what he didn't do. He didn't storm a spiked wall against a man with a loaded gun. He didn't write on the wall with his own hand, to say he had done it. He didn't stop to state that his justification was self-defence. He didn't explain that he had no quarrel with the poor warder. He didn't name the house of the rich man to which he was going with the gun. He didn't write his own initials in a man's blood. Saints alive ! Can't you see the whole character is different, in good and evil ? Why, you don't seem to be like I am a bit. One would think you'd never had any vices of your own.'

The amazed American had already parted his lips in protest when the door of his private and official room was hammered and rattled in an unceremonious way to which he was totally unaccustomed.

The door flew open. The moment before Greywood Usher had been coming to the conclusion that Father Brown might possibly be mad. The moment after he began to think he

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

was mad himself. There burst and fell into his private room a man in the filthiest rags, with a greasy squash hat still askew on his head, and a shabby green shade showed up from one of his eyes, both of which were glaring like a tiger's. The rest of his face was almost undiscoverable, being masked with a matted beard, and whiskers through which the nose could barely thrust itself, and further buried in a squalid red scarf or handkerchief. Mr. Usher prided himself on having seen most of the roughest specimens in the State, but he thought he had never seen such a baboon dressed as a scarecrow as this. But above all, he had never in all his placid scientific existence heard a man like that speak to him first.

'See here, old man Usher,' shouted the being in the red handkerchief, 'I'm getting tired. Don't you try any of your hide-and-seek on me ; I don't get fooled any. Leave go of my guests, and I'll let up on the fancy clock-work. Keep him here for a split instant and you'll feel pretty mean. I reckon I'm not a man with no pull.'

The eminent Usher was regarding the bellowing monster with an amazement which had dried up all other sentiments. The mere shock to his eyes had rendered his ears almost useless. At last he rang a bell with a hand of

violence. While the bell was still strong and pealing, the voice of Father Brown fell soft but distinct.

'I have a suggestion to make,' he said, 'but it seems a little confusing. I don't know this gentleman—but—but I think I know him. Now, you know him—you know him quite well—but you don't know him; naturally. Sounds paradoxical, I know.'

'I reckon the Cosmos is cracked,' said Usher, and fell asprawl in his round office chair.

'Now, see here,' vociferated the stranger, striking the table, but speaking in a voice that was all the more mysterious because it was comparatively mild and rational though still resounding, 'I won't let you in. I want—'

'Who in hell are you?' yelled Usher, suddenly sitting up straight.

'I think the gentleman's name is Todd,' said the priest.

Then he picked up the pink slip of newspaper.

'I fear you don't read the Society papers properly,' he said, and began to read out in a monotonous voice, '"Or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the manners and customs of the other end of Society's scale."

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

There's been a big Slum Dinner up at Pilgrim's Pond to-night ; and a man, one of the guests, disappeared. Mr. Ireton Todd is a good host, and has tracked him here, without even waiting to take off his fancy dress.'

' What man do you mean ? '

' I mean the man with the comically ill-fitting clothes you saw running across the ploughed field. Hadn't you better go and investigate him ? He will be rather impatient to get back to his champagne, from which he ran away in such a hurry, when the convict with the gun hove in sight.'

' Do you seriously mean——' began the official.

' Why, look here, Mr. Usher,' said Father Brown quietly, ' you said the machine couldn't make a mistake ; and in one sense it didn't. But the other machine did ; the machine that worked it. You assumed that the man in rags jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy, because he was Lord Falconroy's murderer. He jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he *is* Lord Falconroy.'

' Then why the blazes didn't he say so ? ' demanded the staring Usher.

' He felt his plight and recent panic were hardly patrician,' replied the priest, ' so he tried to keep the name back at first. But he

was just going to tell it you, when'—and Father Brown looked down at his boots—‘when a woman found another name for him.’

‘But you can’t be so mad as to say,’ said Greywood Usher, very white, ‘that Lord Falconroy was Drugger Davis.’

The priest looked at him very earnestly but with a baffling and a decipherable face.

‘I am not saying anything about it,’ he said; ‘I leave all the rest to you. Your pink paper says that the title was recently revived for him; but those papers are very unreliable. It says he was in the States in youth; but the whole story seems very strange. Davis and Falconroy are both pretty considerable cowards, but so are lots of other men. I would not hang a dog on my own opinion about this. But I think,’ he went on softly and reflectively, ‘I think you Americans are too modest. I think you idealize the English aristocracy—even in assuming it to be so aristocratic. You see a good-looking Englishman in evening dress; you know he’s in the House of Lords; and you fancy he has a father. You don’t allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential noblemen have not only risen recently, but—’

‘Oh, stop it!’ cried Greywood Usher,

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

wringing one lean hand in impatience against a shade of irony in the other's face.

'Don't stay talking to this lunatic!' cried Todd brutally. 'Take me to my friend.'

Next morning Father Brown appeared with the same demure expression, carrying yet another piece of pink newspaper.

'I'm afraid you neglect the fashionable press rather,' he said, 'but this cutting may interest you.'

Usher read the headlines, 'Last-Trick's Strayed Revellers : Mirthful Incident near Pilgrim's Pond.' The paragraph went on: 'A laughable occurrence took place outside Wilkinson's Motor Garage last night. A policeman on duty had his attention drawn by larrikins to a man in prison dress who was stepping with considerable coolness into the steering seat of a pretty high-toned Panhard; he was accompanied by a girl wrapped in a ragged shawl. On the police interfering, the young woman threw back the shawl, and all recognized Millionaire Todd's daughter, who had just come from the Slum Freak Dinner at the Pond, where all the choicest guests were in a similar *déshabillé*. She and the gentleman who had donned prison uniform were going for the customary joy-ride.'

Under the pink slip Mr. Usher found a strip

G. K. CHESTERTON

of a later paper, headed, ‘Astounding Escape of Millionaire’s Daughter with Convict. She Had Arranged Freak Dinner. Now Safe in—’

Mr. Greywood Usher lifted his eyes, but Father Brown was gone.

VI. WHAT I FOUND IN MY POCKET

ONCE when I was very young I met one of those men who have made the Empire what it is—a man in an astrakhan coat, with an astrakhan moustache—a tight, black, curly, moustache. Whether he put on the moustache with the coat, or whether his Napoleonic will enabled him not only to grow a moustache in the usual place, but also to grow little moustaches all over his clothes, I do not know. I only remember that he said to me the following words : ‘A man can’t get on nowadays by hanging about with his hands in his pockets.’ I made reply with the quite obvious flippancy that perhaps a man got on by having his hands in other people’s pockets. Whereupon he began to argue about Moral Evolution, so I suppose what I said had some truth in it. But the incident now comes back to me, and connects itself with another incident—if you can call it an incident—which happened to me only the other day.

I have only once in my life picked a pocket, and then (perhaps through some absent-mindedness) I picked my own. My act can really with some reason be so described. For

in taking things out of my own pocket I had at least one of the more tense and quivering emotions of the thief ; I had a complete ignorance and a profound curiosity as to what I should find there. Perhaps it would be the exaggeration of eulogy to call me a tidy person. But I can always pretty satisfactorily account for all my possessions. I can always tell where they are, and what I have done with them, so long as I can keep them out of my pockets. If once anything slips into those unknown abysses, I wave it a sad Virgilian farewell. I suppose that the things that I have dropped into my pockets are still there ; the same presumption applies to the things that I have dropped into the sea. But I regard the riches stored in both these bottomless chasms with the same reverent ignorance. They tell us that on the last day the sea will give up its dead ; and I suppose that on the same occasion long strings and strings of extraordinary things will come running out of my pockets. But I have quite forgotten what any of them are ; and there is really nothing (excepting the money) that I shall be at all surprised at finding among them.

Such at least has hitherto been my state of

WHAT I FOUND IN MY POCKET

innocence. I here only wish briefly to call the special, extraordinary, and hitherto unprecedented circumstances which led me in cold blood, and being of sound mind, to turn out my pockets. I was locked up in a third-class carriage for a rather long journey. The time was towards evening, but it might have been anything, for everything resembling earth or sky or light or shade was painted out as if with a great wet brush by an unshifting sheet of quite colourless rain. I had no books or newspapers. I had not even a pencil and a scrap of paper with which to write a religious epic. There were no advertisements on the walls of the carriage, otherwise I could have plunged into the study of them, for any collection of printed words is quite enough to suggest infinite complexities of mental ingenuity. When I find myself opposite the words 'Sunlight Soap' I can exhaust all the aspects of Sun Worship, Apollo, and summer poetry before I go on to the less congenial subject of soap. But there was no printed word or picture anywhere. there was nothing but blank wood inside the carriage and blank wet without. Now I deny most energetically that anything is, or can be, uninteresting. So I stared at the joints of the walls and seats, and began thinking hard on the fascinating subject of wood. Just as I had

G. K. CHESTERTON

begun to realize why, perhaps, it was that Christ was a carpenter, rather than a brick-layer, or a baker, or anything else, I suddenly started upright, and remembered my pockets. I was carrying about with me an unknown treasure. I had a British Museum and a South Kensington collection of unknown curios hung all over me in different places. I began to take the things out.

The first thing I came upon consisted of piles and heaps of Battersea tram tickets. There were enough to equip a paper chase. They shook down in showers like confetti. Primarily, of course, they touched my patriotic emotions, and brought tears to my eyes ; also they provided me with the printed matter I required, for I found on the back of them some short but striking little scientific essays about some kind of pill. Comparatively speaking, in my then destitution, those tickets might be regarded as a small but well-chosen scientific library. Should my railway journey continue (which seemed likely at the time) for a few months longer, I could imagine myself throwing myself into the controversial aspects of the pill, composing replies and rejoinders pro and con upon the data furnished to me. But, after all, it was

WHAT I FOUND IN MY POCKET

the symbolic quality of the tickets that moved me most. For as certainly as the Cross of St. George means English patriotism, those scraps of paper meant all that municipal patriotism which is now, perhaps, the greatest hope of England.

The next thing that I took out was a pocket-knife. A pocket-knife, I need hardly say, would require a thick book full of moral meditations all to itself. A knife typifies one of the most primary of those practical origins upon which as upon low, thick pillars all our human civilization reposes. Metals, the mystery of the thing called iron and of the thing called steel, led me off half dazed into a kind of dream. I saw into the entrails of dim, damp woods : where the first man, among all the common stones, found the strange stone. I saw a vague and violent battle, in which stone axes broke and stone knives were splintered against something shining and new in the hand of one desperate man. I heard all the hammers on all the anvils of the earth. I saw all the swords of feudal and all the wheels of industrial war. For the knife is only a short sword ; and the pocket-knife is a secret sword. I opened it and looked at that brilliant and terrible tongue which we call a blade ; and I thought that perhaps it was the symbol of the oldest of the

G. K. CHESTERTON

needs of man. The next moment I knew that I was wrong ; for the thing that came next out of my pocket was a box of matches. Then I saw fire, which is stronger even than steel, the old, fierce female thing, the thing we all love, but dare not touch.

The next thing I found was a piece of chalk ; and I saw in it all the art and all the frescoes of the world. The next was a coin of a very modest value ; and I saw in it not only the image and superscription of our own Caesar, but all government and order since the world began. But I have not space to say what were the items in the long and splendid procession of poetical symbols that came pouring out. I cannot tell you all the things that were in my pocket. I can tell you one thing, however, that I could not find in my pocket. I allude to my railway ticket.

VII. THE PERFECT GAME

WE have all met the man who says that some odd things have happened to him, but that he does not really believe that they were supernatural. My own position is the opposite of this. I believe in the supernatural as a matter of intellect and reason, not as a matter of personal experience: I do not see ghosts ; I only see their inherent probability. But it is entirely a matter of the mere intelligence, not even of the emotions ; my nerves and body are altogether of this earth, very earthy. But upon people of this temperament one weird incident will often leave a peculiar impression. And the weirdest circumstance that ever occurred to me occurred a little while ago. It consisted in nothing less than my playing a game, and playing it quite well for some seventeen consecutive minutes. The ghost of my grandfather would have astonished me less.

On one of these blue and burning afternoons I found myself, to my inexpressible astonishment, playing a game called croquet. I had imagined that it belonged to the epoch of Leech and Anthony Trollope, and I had

neglected to provide myself with those very long and luxuriant side whiskers which are really essential to such a scene. I played it with a man whom we will call Parkinson, and with whom I had a semi-philosophical argument which lasted through the entire contest. It is deeply implanted in my mind that I had the best of the argument ; but it is certain and beyond dispute that I had the worst of the game.

‘ Oh, Parkinson, Parkinson ! ’ I cried, patting him affectionately on the head with a mallet, ‘ how far you really are from the pure love of the sport—you who can play. It is only we who play badly who love the Game itself. You love glory ; you love applause ; you love the earthquake voice of victory ; you do not love croquet. You do not love croquet until you love being beaten at croquet. It is we the bunglers who adore the occupation in the abstract. It is we to whom it is art for art’s sake. If we may see the face of Croquet herself (if I may so express myself) we are content to see her face turned upon us in anger. Our play is called amateurish ; and we wear proudly the name of amateur, for amateurs is but the French for Lovers. We accept all adventures from our Lady, the most disastrous or the most dreary. We wait outside her iron

THE PERFECT GAME

gates (I allude to the hoops), vainly essaying to enter. Our devoted balls, impetuous and full of chivalry, will not be confined within the pedantic boundaries of the mere croquet ground. Our balls seek honour in the ends of the earth ; they turn up in the flower-beds and the conservatory ; they are to be found in the front garden and the next street. No, Parkinson ! The good painter loves his skill. It is the bad painter who loves his art. The good musician loves being a musician ; the bad musician loves music. With such a pure and hopeless passion do I worship croquet. I love the game itself. I love the parallelogram of grass marked out with chalk or tape, as if its limits were the frontiers of my sacred fatherland, the four seas of Britain. I love the mere swing of the mallets, and the click of the balls is music. The four colours are to me sacramental and symbolic, like the red of martyrdom, or the white of Easter Day. You lose all this, my poor Parkinson. You have to solace yourself for the absence of this vision by the paltry consolation of being able to go through hoops and to hit the stick.'

And I waved my mallet in the air with a graceful gaiety.

'Don't be too sorry for me,' said Parkinson, with his simple sarcasm. 'I shall get over it in

time. But it seems to me that the more a man likes a game the better he would want to play it. Suppose the pleasure in the thing itself does come first, doesn't the pleasure of success come naturally and inevitably afterwards? Or, take your own simile of the Knight and his Lady-love. I admit the gentleman does first and foremost want to be in the lady's presence. But I never heard of a gentleman who wanted to look an utter ass when he was there.

'Perhaps not; though he generally looks it,' I replied. 'But the truth is that there is a fallacy in the simile, although it was my own. The happiness at which the lover is aiming is an infinite happiness, which can be extended without limit. The more he is loved, normally speaking, the jollier he will be. It is definitely true that the stronger the love of both lovers, the stronger will be the happiness. But it is not true that the stronger the play of both croquet players the stronger will be the game. It is logically possible—(follow me closely here, Parkinson!)—it is logically possible, to play croquet too well to enjoy it at all. If you could put this blue ball through that distant hoop as easily as you could pick it up with your hand, then you would not put it through that hoop any more than you pick it up with your

THE PERFECT GAME

hand ; it would not be worth doing. If you could play unerringly you would not play at all. The moment the game is perfect the game disappears.'

'I do not think, however,' said Parkinson, 'that you are in any immediate danger of effecting that sort of destruction. I do not think your croquet will vanish through its own faultless excellence. You are safe for the present.'

I again caressed him with the mallet, knocked a ball about, wired myself, and resumed the thread of my discourse.

The long, warm evening had been gradually closing in, and by this time it was almost twilight. By the time I had delivered four more fundamental principles, and my companion had gone through five more hoops, the dusk was verging upon dark.

'We shall have to give this up,' said Parkinson, as he missed a ball almost for the first time. 'I can't see a thing.'

'Nor can I,' I answered, 'and it is a comfort to reflect that I could not hit anything if I saw it.'

With that I struck a ball smartly, and sent it away into the darkness towards where the shadowy figure of Parkinson moved in the hot haze. Parkinson immediately uttered a loud

and dramatic cry. The situation, indeed, called for it. I had hit the right ball.

Stunned with astonishment, I crossed the gloomy ground, and hit my ball again. It went through a hoop. I could not see the hoop ; but it was the right hoop. I shuddered from head to foot.

Words were wholly inadequate, so I slouched heavily after that impossible ball. Again I hit it away into the night, in what I supposed was the vague direction of the quite invisible stick. And in the dead silence I heard the stick rattle as the ball struck it heavily.

I threw down my mallet. ‘I can’t stand this,’ I said. ‘My ball has gone right three times. These things are not of this world.’

‘Pick your mallet up,’ said Parkinson ; ‘have another go.’

‘I tell you I daren’t. If I made another hoop like that I should see all the devils dancing there on the blessed grass.’

‘Why devils ?’ asked Parkinson ; ‘they may be only fairies making fun of you. They are sending you the “Perfect Game,” which is no game.’

I looked about me. The garden was full of a burning darkness, in which the faint glimmers had the look of fire. I stepped across the grass

THE PERFECT GAME

as if it burnt me, picked up the mallet, and hit the ball somewhere—somewhere where another ball might be. I heard the dull click of the balls touching, and ran into the house like one pursued.

VIII. IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND

RECENTLY, in an idle metaphor, I took the tumbling of trees and the secret energy of the wind as typical of the visible world moving under the violence of the invisible. I took this metaphor merely because I happened to be writing the article in a wood. Nevertheless, now that I return to Fleet Street (which seems to me, I confess, much better and more poetical than all the wild woods in the world), I am strangely haunted by this accidental comparison. The people's figures seem a forest and their soul a wind. All the human personalities which speak or signal to me seem to have this fantastic character of the fringe of the forest against the sky. That man that talks to me, what is he but an articulate tree? That driver of a van who waves his hands wildly at me to tell me to get out of the way, what is he but a bunch of branches stirred and swayed by a spiritual wind, a sylvan object that I can continue to contemplate with calm? That policeman who lifts his hand to warn three omnibuses of the peril that they run in encountering my person, what is he but a shrub shaken for a moment with that blast of human

IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND

law which is a thing stranger than anarchy ? Gradually this impression of the woods wears off. But this black-and-white contrast between the visible and invisible, this deep sense that the one essential belief is belief in the invisible as against the visible, is suddenly and sensation-ally brought back to my mind. Exactly at the moment when Fleet Street has grown most familiar (that is, most bewildering and bright), my eye catches a poster of vivid violet, on which I see written in large black letters these remarkable words : ‘ Should Shop Assistants Marry ? ’

When I saw those words everything might just as well have turned topsy-turvy. The men in Fleet Street might have been walking about on their hands. The cross of St. Paul’s might have been hanging in the air upside down. For I realize that I have really come into a topsy-turvy country ; I have come into the country where men do definitely believe that the waving of the trees makes the wind. That is to say, they believe that the material circumstances, however black and twisted, are more important than the spiritual realities, however powerful and pure. ‘ Should Shop Assistants Marry ? ’ I am puzzled to think what some periods and schools of human history would

have made of such a question. The ascetics of the East or of some periods of the Early Church would have thought that the question meant, ‘Are not shop assistants too saintly, too much of another world, even to feel the emotions of the sexes?’ But I suppose that is not what the purple poster means. In some Pagan cities it might have meant, ‘Shall slaves so vile as shop assistants even be allowed to propagate their abject race?’ But I suppose that is not what the purple poster means. We must face, I fear, the full insanity of what it does mean. It does really mean that a section of the human race is asking whether the primary relations of the two human sexes are particularly good for modern shops. The human race is asking whether Adam and Eve are entirely suitable for Marshall and Snelgrove. If this is not topsy-turvy I cannot imagine what would be. We ask whether the universal institution will improve our (please God) temporary institutions. Yet I have known many such questions. For instance, I have known a man ask seriously, ‘Does Democracy help the Empire?’ Which is like saying, ‘Is art favourable to frescoes?’

I say that there are many such questions asked. But if the world ever runs short of them, I can suggest a large number of questions

IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND

of precisely the same kind, based on precisely the same principle. ‘Do Feet Improve Boots?’—‘Is Bread Better when Eaten?’—‘Should Hats Have Heads in Them?’—‘Do People Spoil a Town?’—‘Do Walls Ruin Wall-papers?’—‘Should Neckties Enclose Necks?’—‘Do Hands Hurt Walking-sticks?’—‘Does Burning Destroy Firewood?’—‘Is Cleanliness Good for Soap?’—‘Can Cricket Really Improve Cricket-bats?’—‘Shall We Take Brides with Our Wedding Rings?’—and a hundred others.

Not one of these questions differs at all in intellectual purport or an intellectual value from the question which I have quoted from the purple poster, or from any of the typical questions asked by half of the earnest economists of our times. All the questions they ask are of this character; they are all tinged with this same initial absurdity. They do not ask if the means is suited to the end; they all ask (with profound and penetrating scepticism) if the end is suited to the means. They do not ask whether the tail suits the dog. They all ask whether a dog is (by the highest artistic canons) the most ornamental appendage that can be put at the end of a tail. In short, instead of asking whether our modern arrangements, our streets, trades, bargains, laws, and

concrete institutions are suited to the primal and permanent ideal of a healthy human life, they never admit that healthy human life into the discussion at all except suddenly and accidentally at odd moments ; and then they only ask whether that healthy human life is suited to our streets and trades. Perfection may be attainable or unattainable as an end. It may or may not be possible to talk of imperfection as a means to perfection. But surely it passes toleration to talk of perfection as a means to imperfection. The New Jerusalem may be a reality. It may be a dream. But surely it is too outrageous to say that the New Jerusalem is a reality on the road to Birmingham.

This is the most enormous and at the same time the most secret of the modern tyrannies of materialism. In theory the thing ought to be simple enough. A really human human being would always put the spiritual things first. A walking and speaking statue of God finds himself at one particular moment employed as a shop assistant. He has in himself a power of terrible love, a promise of paternity, a thirst for some loyalty that shall unify life, and in the ordinary course of things he asks himself, ‘ How

IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND

far do the existing conditions of those assisting in shops fit in with my evident and epic destiny in the matter of love and marriage ? ' But here, as I have said, comes in the quiet and crushing power of modern materialism. It prevents him rising in rebellion, as he would otherwise do. By perpetually talking about environment and visible things, by perpetually talking about economics and physical necessity, by painting and keeping repainted a perpetual picture of iron machinery and merciless engines, of rails of steel, and of towers of stone, modern materialism at last produces this tremendous impression on the human imagination, this impression in which the truth is stated upside down. At last the result is achieved. The man does not say as he ought to have said, ' Should married men endure being modern shop assistants ? ' The man says, ' Should shop assistants marry ? ' Triumph has completed the immense illusion of materialism. The slave does not say, ' Are these chains worthy of me ? ' The slave says scientifically and contentedly, ' Am I even worthy of these chains ? '

IX. A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

MY relations with the readers of this page have been long and pleasant, but—perhaps for that very reason—I feel that the time has come when I ought to confess the one great crime of my life. It happened a long time ago ; but it is not uncommon for a belated burst of remorse to reveal such dark episodes long after they have occurred. It has nothing to do with the orgies of the Anti-Puritan League. That body is so offensively respectable that a newspaper, in describing it the other day, referred to my friend Mr. Edgar Jepson as Canon Edgar Jepson ; and it is believed that similar titles are intended for all of us. No ; it is not by the conduct of Archbishop Crane, of Dean Chesterton, of the Rev. James Douglas, of Monsignor Bland, and even of that fine and virile old ecclesiastic, Cardinal Nesbit, that I wish (or rather, am driven by my conscience) to make this declaration. The crime was committed in solitude and without accomplices. Alone I did it. Let me, with the characteristic thirst of penitents to get the worst of the confession over, state it first of all in its most dreadful and indefensible form. There is

A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

at the present moment in a town in Germany (unless he has died of rage on discovering his wrong) a restaurant-keeper to whom I still owe twopence. I last left his open-air restaurant knowing that I owed him twopence. I carried it away under his nose, despite the fact that the nose was a decidedly Jewish one. I have never paid him, and it is highly improbable that I ever shall. How did this villainy come to occur in a life which has been, generally speaking, deficient in the dexterity necessary for fraud ? The story is as follows—and it has a moral, though there may not be room for that.

.

It is a fair general rule for those travelling on the Continent that the easiest way of talking in a foreign language is to talk philosophy. The most difficult kind of talking is to talk about common necessities. The reason is obvious. The names of common necessities vary completely with each nation and are generally somewhat odd and quaint. How, for instance, could a Frenchman suppose that a coalbox would be called a ‘scuttle’? If he has ever seen the word scuttle it has been in the Jingo Press, where the ‘policy of scuttle’ is used whenever we give up something to a small power like Liberals, instead of giving up everything to a

great power, like Imperialists. What Englishman in Germany would be poet enough to guess that the Germans call a glove a 'hand-shoe'? Nations name their necessities by nicknames, so to speak. They call their tubs and stools by quaint, elvish, and almost affectionate names, as if they were their own children. But any one can argue about abstract things in a foreign language who has ever got as far as Exercise IV in a primer. For as soon as he can put a sentence together at all he finds that the words used in abstract or philosophical discussion are almost the same in all nations. They are the same, for the simple reason that they all come from the things that were the roots of our common civilization. From Christianity, from the Roman Empire, from the medieval Church, or the French Revolution. 'Nation', 'citizen', 'religion', 'philosophy', 'authority', 'the Republic', words like these are nearly the same in all the countries in which we travel. Restraine, therefore, your exuberant admiration for the young man who can argue with six French atheists when he first lands at Dieppe. Even I can do that. But very likely the same young man does not know the French for a shoe-horn. But to this generalization there are three great exceptions.

(1) In the case of countries that are not

A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

European at all, and have never had our civic conceptions, or the old Latin scholarship. I do not pretend that the Patagonian phrase for 'citizenship' at once leaps to the mind, or that a Dyak's word for 'the Republic' has been familiar to me from the nursery. (2) In the case of Germany, where, although the principle does apply to many words such as 'nation' and 'philosophy', it does not apply so generally, because Germany has had a special and deliberate policy of encouraging the purely German part of its language. (3) In the case where one does not know any of the language at all, as is generally the case with me.

.

Such at least was my situation on the dark day on which I committed my crime. Two of the exceptional conditions which I have mentioned were combined. I was walking about a German town, and I knew no German. I knew, however, two or three of those great and solemn words which hold our European civilization together—one of which is 'cigar'. As it was a hot and dreamy day, I sat down at a table in a sort of beer-garden, and ordered a cigar and a pot of lager. I drank the lager, and paid for it. I smoked the cigar, forgot to pay for it, and walked away, gazing rapturously

at the royal outline of the Taunus mountains. After about ten minutes, I suddenly remembered that I had not paid for the cigar. I went back to the place of refreshment, and put down the money. But the proprietor also had forgotten the cigar, and he merely said guttural things in a tone of query, asking me, I suppose, what I wanted. I said 'cigar', and he gave me a cigar. I endeavoured while putting down the money to wave away the cigar with gestures of refusal. He thought that my rejection was of the nature of a condemnation of that particular cigar, and brought me another. I whirled my arms like a windmill, seeking to convey by the sweeping universality of my gesture that my rejection was a rejection of cigars in general, not of that particular article. He mistook this for the ordinary impatience of common men, and rushed forward, his hands filled with miscellaneous cigars, pressing them upon me. In desperation I tried other kinds of pantomime, but the more cigars I refused the more and more rare and precious cigars were brought out of the deeps and recesses of the establishment. I tried in vain to think of a way of conveying to him the fact that I had already had the cigar. I imitated the action of a citizen smoking, knocking off and throwing away a cigar. The watchful proprietor only

A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

thought I was rehearsing (as in an ecstasy of anticipation) the joys of the cigar he was going to give me. At last I retired baffled : he would not take the money and leave the cigars alone. So that this restaurant-keeper (in whose face a love of money shone like the sun at noonday) flatly and firmly refused to receive twopence that I certainly owed him ; and I took that twopence of his away with me and rioted on it for months. I hope that on the last day the angels will break the truth very gently to that unhappy man.

.

This is the true and exact account of the Great Cigar Fraud, and the moral of it is this—that civilization is founded upon abstractions. The idea of debt is one which cannot be conveyed by physical motions at all, because it is an abstract idea. And civilization obviously would be nothing without debt. So when hard-headed fellows who study scientific sociology (which does not exist) come and tell you that civilization is material or indifferent to the abstract, just ask yourselves how many of the things that make up our Society, the Law, or the Stocks and Shares, or the National Debt, you would be able to convey with your face and your ten fingers by grinning and gesticulating to a German innkeeper.

X. THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING

ON my last morning on the Flemish coast, when I knew that in a few hours I should be in England, my eye fell upon one of the details of Gothic carving of which Flanders is full. I do not know whether the thing was old, though it was certainly knocked about and indecipherable, but at least it was certainly in the style and tradition of the early Middle Ages. It seemed to represent men bending themselves (not to say twisting themselves) to certain primary employments. Some seemed to be sailors tugging at ropes ; others, I think, were reaping ; others were energetically pouring something into something else. This is entirely characteristic of the pictures and carvings of the early thirteenth century, perhaps the most purely vigorous time in all history. The great Greeks preferred to carve their gods and heroes doing nothing. Splendid and philosophic as their composure is, there is always about it something that marks the master of many slaves. But if there was one thing the early medievals liked it was representing people doing something—hunting or hawking, or rowing boats, or treading grapes,

THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING

or making shoes, or cooking something in a pot. 'Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira, voluptas.' (I quote from memory.) The Middle Ages is full of that spirit in all its monuments and manuscripts. Chaucer retains it in his jolly insistence on everybody's type of trade and toil. It was the earliest and youngest resurrection of Europe, the time when social order was strengthening, but had not yet become oppressive ; the time when religious faiths were strong, but had not yet been exasperated. For this reason the whole effect of Greek and Gothic carving is different. The figures in the Elgin marbles, though often rearing their steeds for an instant in the air, seem frozen for ever at that perfect instant. But a mass of medieval carving seems actually a sort of bustle or hubbub in stone. Sometimes one cannot help feeling that the groups actually move and mix, and the whole front of a great cathedral has the hum of a huge hive.

But about these particular figures there was a peculiarity of which I could not be sure. Those of them that had any heads had very curious heads, and it seemed to me that they had their mouths open. Whether or no this really meant anything or was an accident of nascent art I do not know ; but in the course

of wondering I recalled to my mind the fact that singing was connected with many of the tasks there suggested, that there were songs for reapers reaping and songs for sailors hauling ropes. I was still thinking about this small problem when I walked along the pier at Ostend ; and I heard some sailors uttering a measured shout as they laboured, and I remembered that sailors still sing in chorus while they work, and even sing different songs according to what part of their work they are doing. And a little while afterwards, when my sea journey was over, the sight of men working in the English fields reminded me again that there are still songs for harvest and for many agricultural routines. And I suddenly wondered why, if this were so, it should be quite unknown for any modern trade to have a ritual poetry. How did people come to chant rude poems while pulling certain ropes or gathering certain fruit, and why did nobody do anything of the kind while producing any of the modern things ? Why is a modern newspaper never printed by people singing in chorus ? Why do shopmen seldom, if ever, sing ?

If reapers sing while reaping, why should not auditors sing while auditing and bankers while

THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING

banking ? If there are songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a boat, why are there not songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a bank ? As the train from Dover flew through the Kentish gardens, I tried to write a few songs suitable for commercial gentlemen. Thus, the work of bank clerks when casting up columns might begin with a thundering chorus in praise of Simple Addition.

Up, my lads, and lift the ledgers, sleep and ease are o'er.

Hear the Stars of Morning shouting : ' Two and Two
are Four.'

Though the creeds and realms are reeling, though the
sophists roar,

Though we weep and pawn our watches, Two and
Two are Four.

And then, of course, we should need another
song for times of financial crisis and courage, a
song with a more fierce and panic-stricken
metre, like the rushing of horses in the night :

There's a run upon the Bank—
Stand away !

For the Manager's a crank and the Secretary drank, and
the Upper Tooting Bank
Turns to bay !

Stand close : there is a run
On the Bank.

Of our ship, our royal one, let the ringing legend run,
that she fired every gun
Ere she sank.

And as I came into the cloud of London I met a friend of mine who actually is in a bank, and submitted these suggestions in rhyme to him for use among his colleagues. But he was not very hopeful about the matter. It was not (he assured me) that he underrated the verses, or in any sense lamented their lack of polish. No ; it was rather, he felt, an indefinable something in the very atmosphere of the society in which we live that makes it spiritually difficult to sing in banks. And I think he must be right ; though the matter is very mysterious. I may observe here that I think there must be some mistake in the calculations of the Socialists. They put down all our distress not to a moral tone, but to the chaos of private enterprise. Now, banks are private ; but post offices are Socialistic : therefore I naturally expected that the post office would fall into the collectivist idea of a chorus. Judge of my surprise when the lady in my local post office (whom I urged to sing) dismissed the idea with far more coldness than the bank clerk had done. She seemed, indeed, to be in a considerably greater state of depression than he. Should any one suppose that this was the effect of the verses themselves, it is only fair to say that the specimen verse of the Post Office Hymn ran thus :

THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING

O'er London our letters are shaken like snow,
Our wires o'er the world like the thunder-bolts go.
The news that may marry a maiden in Sark,
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.

Chorus (with a swing of joy and energy) :
Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.

And the more I thought about the matter the more painfully certain it seemed that the most important and typical modern things could not be done with a chorus. One could not, for instance, be a great financier and sing ; because the essence of being a great financier is that you keep quiet. You could not even in many modern circles be a public man and sing ; because in those circles the essence of being a public man is that you do nearly everything in private. Nobody would imagine a chorus of moneylenders. Every one knows the story of the solicitors' corps of volunteers who, when the Colonel on the battlefield cried ' Charge ! ' all said simultaneously, ' Six-and-eightpence.' Men can sing while charging in a military, but hardly in a legal sense. And at the end of my reflections I had really got no further than the subconscious feeling of my friend the bank clerk—that there is something spiritually suffocating about our life ; not about our laws merely, but about our life. Bank clerks are without songs not because they are poor, but

G. K. CHESTERTON

because they are sad. Sailors are much poorer. As I passed homewards I passed a little tin building of some religious sort, which was shaken with shouting as a trumpet is torn with its own tongue. *They* were singing anyhow ; and I had for an instant a fancy I had often had before : that with us the super-human is the only place where you can find the human. Human nature is hunted, and has fled into sanctuary.

XI. THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY

ONE day, as I was leaving London for a holiday, a friend walked into my flat in Battersea and found me surrounded with half-packed luggage.

‘ You seem to be off on your travels,’ he said.
‘ Where are you going?’

With a strap between my teeth I replied,
‘ To Battersea.’

‘ The wit of your remark,’ he said, ‘ wholly escapes me.’

‘ I am going to Battersea,’ I repeated, ‘ to Battersea via Paris, Belfort, Heidelberg, and Frankfort. My remark contained no wit. It contained simply the truth. I am going to wander over the whole world until once more I find Battersea. Somewhere in the seas of sunset or of sunrise, somewhere in the ultimate archipelago of the earth, there is one little island which I wish to find : an island with low green hills and great white cliffs. Travellers tell me that it is called England (Scotch travellers tell me that it is called Britain), and there is a rumour that somewhere in the heart of it there is a beautiful place called Battersea.’

‘ I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you,’

said my friend, with an air of intellectual compassion, ‘that this is Battersea?’

‘It is quite unnecessary,’ I said, ‘and it is spiritually untrue. I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair; because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign lands; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land. Now I warn you that this Gladstone bag is compact and heavy, and that if you utter that word ‘paradox’ I shall hurl it at your head. I did not make the world, and I did not make it paradoxical. It is not my fault, it is the truth, that the only way to go to England is to go away from it.’

But when after only a month’s travelling I did come back to England, I was startled to find that I had told the exact truth. England did break on me at once beautifully new and

THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY

beautifully old. To land at Dover is the right way to approach England (most things that are hackneyed are right), for then you see first the full, soft gardens of Kent, which are, perhaps, an exaggeration, but still a typical exaggeration, of the rich rusticity of England. As it happened, also, a fellow-traveller with whom I had fallen into conversation felt the same freshness, though for another cause. She was an American lady who had seen Europe, and had never yet seen England, and she expressed her enthusiasm in that simple and splendid way which is natural to Americans, who are the most idealistic people in the whole world. Their only danger is that the idealist can easily become the idolater. And the American has become so idealistic that he even idealizes money. But (to quote a very able writer of American short stories) that is another story.

‘I have never been in England before,’ said the American lady, ‘yet it is so pretty that I feel as if I have been away from it for a long time.’

‘So you have,’ I said; ‘you have been away for three hundred years.’

‘What a lot of ivy you have,’ she said. ‘It covers the churches and it buries the houses. We have ivy; but I have never seen it grow like that.’

‘I am interested to hear it,’ I replied, ‘for

G. K. CHESTERTON

I am making a little list of all the things that are really better in England. Even a month on the Continent, combined with intelligence, will teach you that there are many things that are better abroad. All the things that Mr. Kipling calls English are better abroad. But there are things entirely English and entirely good. Kippers, for instance, and Free Trade, and front gardens, and individual liberty, and the Elizabethan drama, and hansom cabs, and cricket, and Mr. Will Crooks. Above all, there is the happy and holy custom of eating a heavy breakfast. I cannot imagine that Shakespeare began the day with rolls and coffee, like a Frenchman or a German. Surely he began with bacon or bloaters. In fact, a light bursts upon me ; for the first time I see the real meaning of Mrs. Gallup and the Great Cipher. It is merely a mistake in the matter of a capital letter. I withdraw my objections ; I accept everything ; bacon did write Shakespeare.'

'I cannot look at anything but the ivy,' she said, 'it looks so comfortable.'

While she looked at the ivy I opened for the first time for many weeks an English newspaper, and I read a speech by Mr. Balfour in which he said that the House of Lords ought to be preserved because it represented something in the nature of permanent public opinion of

THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY

England, above the ebb and flow of the parties. Now Mr. Balfour is a perfectly sincere patriot, a man who, from his own point of view, thinks long and seriously about the public needs, and he is, moreover, a man of entirely exceptional intellectual power. But alas ! in spite of all this, when I had read that speech I thought with a heavy heart that there was one more thing that I had to add to the list of the specially English things, such as kippers and cricket ; I had to add the specially English kind of humbug. In France things are attacked and defended for what they are. The Catholic Church is attacked because it is Catholic, and defended because it is Catholic. The Republic is defended because it is Republican, and attacked because it is Republican. But here is the ablest of English politicians consoling everybody by explaining that the House of Lords is not really the House of Lords, but something quite different, that the foolish, accidental peers whom he meets every night are in some mysterious way experts upon the psychology of the democracy ; that if you want to know what the very poor want you must ask the very rich, and that if you want the truth about Hoxton you must ask for it at Hatfield. If the Conservative defender of the House of Lords were a logical French politician he would simply be

a liar. But being an English politician he is simply a poet. The English love of believing that all is as it should be, the English optimism combined with the strong English imagination, is too much even for the obvious facts. In a cold, scientific sense, of course, Mr. Balfour knows that nearly all the Lords who are not Lords by accident are Lords by bribery. He knows, and (as Mr. Belloc excellently said) everybody in Parliament knows, the very names of the peers who have purchased their peerages. But the glamour of comfort, the pleasure of reassuring himself and reassuring others, is too strong for this original knowledge ; at last it fades from him, and he sincerely and earnestly calls on Englishmen to join with him in admiring an august and public-spirited Senate, having wholly forgotten that the Senate really consists of dunces whom he has himself despised and adventurers whom he has himself ennobled.

‘Your ivy is so beautifully soft and thick,’ said the American lady, ‘it seems to cover almost everything. It must be the most poetical thing in England.’

‘It is very beautiful,’ I said, ‘and, as you say, it is very English. Charles Dickens, who was almost more English than England, wrote one of his rare poems about the beauty of ivy.

THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY

Yes, by all means let us admire the ivy, so deep, so warm, so full of a genial gloom and a grotesque tenderness. Let us admire the ivy ; and let us pray to God in His mercy that it may not kill the tree.'

XII. THE THREE KINDS OF MEN

ROUGHLY speaking, there are three kinds of people in this world. The first kind of people are People ; they are the largest and probably the most valuable class. We owe to this class the chairs we sit down on, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in ; and, indeed (when we come to think of it), we probably belong to this class ourselves. The second class may be called for convenience the Poets ; they are often a nuisance to their families, but, generally speaking, a blessing to mankind. The third class is that of the Professors or Intellectuals ; sometimes described as the thoughtful people ; and these are a blight and a desolation both to their families and also to mankind. Of course, the classification sometimes overlaps, like all classification. Some good people are almost poets and some bad poets are almost professors. But the division follows lines of real psychological cleavage. I do not offer it lightly. It has been the fruit of more than eighteen minutes of earnest reflection and research.

The class called People (to which you and I, with no little pride, attach ourselves) has

THE THREE KINDS OF MEN

certain casual, yet profound, assumptions, which are called ‘commonplaces’, as that children are charming, or that twilight is sad and sentimental, or that one man fighting three is a fine sight. Now, these feelings are not crude ; they are not even simple. The charm of children is very subtle ; it is even complex, to the extent of being almost contradictory. It is, at its very plainest, mingled of a regard for hilarity and a regard for helplessness. The sentiment of twilight, in the vulgarest drawing-room song or the coarsest pair of sweethearts, is, so far as it goes, a subtle sentiment. It is strangely balanced between pain and pleasure ; it might also be called pleasure tempting pain. The plunge of impatient chivalry by which we all admire a man fighting odds is not at all easy to define separately ; it means many things, pity, dramatic surprise, a desire for justice, a delight in experiment and the indeterminate. The ideas of the mob are really very subtle ideas ; but the mob does not express them subtly. In fact, it does not express them at all, except on those occasions (now only too rare) when it indulges in insurrection and massacre.

Now, this accounts for the otherwise unreasonable fact of the existence of Poets. Poets are those who share these popular

sentiments, but can so express them that they prove themselves the strange and delicate things that they really are. Poets draw out the shy refinement of the rabble. Where the common man covers the queerest emotions by saying, ‘Rum little kid’, Victor Hugo will write ‘*L’art d’être grandpère*’; where the stockbroker will only say abruptly, ‘Evenings closing in now,’ Mr. Yeats will write ‘*Into the twilight*’; where the navvy can only mutter something about pluck and being ‘precious game’, Homer will show you the hero in rags in his own hall defying the princes at their banquet. The Poets carry the popular sentiments to a keener and more splendid pitch; but let it always be remembered that it is the popular sentiments that they are carrying. No man ever wrote any good poetry to show that childhood was shocking, or that twilight was gay and farcical, or that a man was contemptible because he had crossed his single sword with three. The people who maintain this are the Professors, or Prigs.

The Poets are those who rise above the people by understanding them. Of course, most of the Poets wrote in prose—Rabelais, for instance, and Dickens. The Prigs rise above the people

THE THREE KINDS OF MEN

by refusing to understand them : by saying that all their dim, strange preferences are prejudices and superstitions. The Prigs make the people feel stupid ; the Poets make the people feel wiser than they could have imagined that they were. There are many weird elements in this situation. The oddest of all perhaps is the fate of the two factors in practical politics. The Poets who embrace and admire the people are often pelted with stones and crucified. The Prigs who despise the people are often loaded with lands and crowned. In the House of Commons, for instance, there are quite a number of prigs, but comparatively few poets. There are no People there at all.

By poets, as I have said, I do not mean people who write poetry, or indeed people who write anything. I mean such people as, having culture and imagination, use them to understand and share the feelings of their fellows ; as against those who use them to rise to what they call a higher plane. Crudely, the poet differs from the mob by his sensibility; the professor differs from the mob by his insensibility. He has not sufficient finesse and sensitiveness to sympathize with the mob. His only notion is coarsely to contradict it, to cut across it, in accordance with some egotistical plan of his own ; to tell himself that whatever the

ignorant say, they are probably wrong. He forgets that ignorance often has the exquisite intuitions of innocence.

Let me take one example which may mark out the outline of the contention. Open the nearest comic paper and let your eye rest lovingly upon a joke about a mother-in-law. Now, the joke, as presented for the populace, will probably be a simple joke ; the old lady will be tall and stout, the hen-pecked husband will be small and cowering. But for all that, a mother-in-law is not a simple idea. She is a very subtle idea. The problem is not that she is big and arrogant ; she is frequently little and quite extraordinarily nice. The problem of the mother-in-law is that she is like the twilight : half one thing and half another. Now, this twilight truth, this fine and even tender embarrassment, might be rendered, as it really is, by a poet, only here the poet would have to be some very penetrating and sincere novelist, like George Meredith, or Mr. H. G. Wells, whose *Ann Veronica* I have just been reading with delight. I would trust the fine poets and novelists because they follow the fairy clue given them in *Comic Cuts*. But suppose the Professor appears, and suppose he says (as he almost

THE THREE KINDS OF MEN

certainly will), ‘A mother-in-law is merely a fellow-citizen. Considerations of sex should not interfere with comradeship. Regard for age should not influence the intellect. A mother-in-law is merely Another Mind. We should free ourselves from these tribal hierarchies and degrees.’ Now, when the Professor says this (as he always does), I say to him, ‘Sir, you are coarser than *Comic Cuts*. You are more vulgar and blundering than the most elephantine music-hall artiste. You are blinder and grosser than the mob. These vulgar knockabouts have, at least, got hold of a social shade and real mental distinction, though they can only express it clumsily. You are so clumsy that you cannot get hold of it at all. If you really cannot see that the bridegroom’s mother and the bride have any reason for constraint or diffidence, then you are neither polite nor humane ; you have no sympathy in you for the deep and doubtful hearts of human folk.’ It is better even to put the difficulty as the vulgar put it than to be pertly unconscious of the difficulty altogether.

The same question might be considered well enough in the old proverb that two is company and three is none. This proverb is the truth put popularly : that is, it is the truth put wrong. Certainly it is untrue that three is

G. K. CHESTERTON

no company. Three is splendid company : three is the ideal number for pure comradeship : as in the Three Musketeers. But if you reject the proverb altogether ; if you say that two and three are the same sort of company ; if you cannot see that there is a wider abyss between two and three than between three and three million—then I regret to inform you that you belong to the Third Class of human beings ; that you shall have no company either of two or three, but shall be alone in a howling desert till you die.

XIII. THE SURRENDER OF A COCKNEY

EVERY man, though he were born in the very belfry of Bow and spent his infancy climbing among chimneys, has waiting for him somewhere a country house which he has never seen ; but which was built for him in the very shape of his soul. It stands patiently waiting to be found, knee-keep in orchards of Kent or mirrored in pools of Lincoln ; and when the man sees it he remembers it, though he has never seen it before. Even I have been forced to confess this at last, who am a Cockney, if ever there was one, a Cockney not only on principle, but with savage pride. I have always maintained, quite seriously, that the Lord is not in the wind or thunder of the waste, but if anywhere in the still small voice of Fleet Street. I sincerely maintain that Nature-worship is more morally dangerous than the most vulgar man-worship of the cities ; since it can easily be perverted into the worship of an impersonal mystery, carelessness, or cruelty. Thoreau would have been a jollier fellow if he had devoted himself to a greengrocer instead of to greens. Swinburne would have been a better novelist if he had worshipped a

fish-monger instead of worshipping the sea. I prefer the philosophy of bricks and mortar to the philosophy of turnips. To call a man a turnip may be playful, but is seldom respectful. But when we wish to pay emphatic honour to a man, to praise the firmness of his nature, the squareness of his conduct, the strong humility with which he is interlocked with his equals in silent mutual support, then we invoke the nobler Cockney metaphor, and call him a brick.

But, despite all these theories, I have surrendered ; I have struck my colours at sight ; at a mere glimpse through the opening of a hedge. I shall come down to living in the country, like any common Socialist or Simple Lifer, I shall end my days in a village, in the character of the Village Idiot, and be a spectacle and a judgment to mankind. I have already learnt the rustic manner of leaning upon a gate ; and I was thus gymnastically occupied at the moment when my eye caught the house that was made for me. It stood well back from the road, and was built of a good yellow brick ; it was narrow for its height, like the tower of some Border robber ; and over the front door was carved in large letters, "1908." That last burst of sincerity, that superb scorn of antiquarian sentiment, over-

THE SURRENDER OF A COCKNEY

whelmed me finally. I closed my eyes in a kind of ecstasy. My friend (who was helping me to lean on the gate) asked me with some curiosity what I was doing.

‘My dear fellow,’ I said, with emotion, ‘I am bidding farewell to forty-three hansom cabmen.’

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I suppose they would think this country rather outside the radius.’

‘Oh, my friend,’ I cried brokenly, ‘how beautiful London is! Why do they only write poetry about the country? I could turn every lyric cry into Cockney.

“ My heart leaps up when I behold
A sky-sign in the sky,”

as I observed in a volume which is too little read, founded on the older English poets. You never saw my “Golden Treasury Re-gilded ; or, The Classics Made Cockney”—it contained some fine lines.

“O Wild West End, thou breath of London’s being.”
or the reminiscence of Keats, beginning

“ City of smuts and mellow fogfulness.”

I have written many such lines on the beauty of London ; yet I never realized that London

was really beautiful till now. Do you ask me why? It is because I have left it for ever.'

'If you will take my advice,' said my friend, 'you will humbly endeavour not to be a fool. What is the sense of this mad modern notion that every literary man must live in the country, with the pigs and the donkeys and the squires? Chaucer and Spenser and Milton and Dryden lived in London; Shakespeare and Dr. Johnson came to London because they had had quite enough of the country. And as for trumpery topical journalists like you, why, they would cut their throats in the country. You have confessed it yourself in your own last words. You hunger and thirst after the streets; you think London the finest place on the planet. And if by some miracle a Bayswater omnibus could come down this green, country lane you would utter a yell of joy.'

Then a light burst upon my brain, and I turned upon him with terrible sternness.

'Why, miserable æsthete,' I said in a voice of thunder, 'that is the true country spirit! That is how the real rustic feels. The real rustic does utter a yell of joy at the sight of a Bayswater omnibus. The real rustic does think London the finest place on the planet. In the few moments that I have stood by this stile, I have grown rooted here like an ancient

THE SURRENDER OF A COCKNEY

tree ; I have been here for ages. Petulant Surburban, I am the real rustic. I believe that the streets of London are paved with gold ; and I mean to see it before I die.'

The evening breeze freshened among the little tossing trees of that lane, and the purple evening clouds piled up and darkened behind my Country Seat, the house that belonged to me, making, by contrast, its yellow bricks gleam like gold. At last my friend said : ' To cut it short, then, you mean that you will live in the country because you won't like it. What on earth will you do here ; dig up the garden ? '

' Dig ! ' I answered, in honourable scorn. ' Dig ! Do work at my Country Seat ; no, thank you. When I find a Country Seat, I sit in it. And for your other objection, you are quite wrong. I do not dislike the country, but I like the town more. Therefore the art of happiness certainly suggests that I should live in the country and think about the town. Modern nature-worship is all upside down. Trees and fields ought to be the ordinary things ; terraces and temples ought to be extraordinary. I am on the side of the man who lives in the country and wants to go to London. I abominate and abjure the man who lives in London and wants to go to the

G. K. CHESTERTON

country ; I do it with all the more heartiness because I am that sort of man myself. We must learn to love London again, as rustics love it. Therefore (I quote again from the great Cockney version of *The Golden Treasury*)

“Therefore, ye gas-pipes, ye asbestos stoves,
Forbode not any severing of our loves.
I have relinquished but your earthly sight,
To hold you dear in a more distant way.
I'll love the 'buses lumbering through the wet
Even more than when I lightly tripped as they.
The grimy colour of the London clay
Is lovely yet.”

because I have found the house where I was really born ; the tall and quiet house from which I can see London afar off, as the miracle of man that it is.’

XIV. THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHTSEEING

IT would be really interesting to know exactly why an intelligent person—by which I mean a person with any sort of intelligence—can and does dislike sight-seeing. Why does the idea of a charabanc full of tourists going to see the birthplace of Nelson or the death-scene of Simon de Montfort strike a strange chill to the soul? I can tell quite easily what this dim aversion to tourists and their antiquities does not arise from—at least, in my case. Whatever my other vices (and they are, of course, of a lurid cast), I can lay my hand on my heart and say that it does not arise from a paltry contempt for the antiquities, nor yet from the still more paltry contempt for the tourists. If there is one thing more dwarfish and pitiful than irreverence for the past, it is irreverence for the present, for the passionate and many-coloured procession of life, which includes the charabanc among its many chariots and triumphal cars. I know nothing so vulgar as that contempt for vulgarity which sneers at the clerks on a Bank Holiday or the Cockneys on Margate sands. The man who notices nothing about the clerk except his Cockney accent

would have noticed nothing about Simon de Montfort except his French accent. The man who jeers at Jones for having dropped an *h* might have jeered at Nelson for having dropped an arm. Scorn springs easily to the essentially vulgar-minded ; and it is as easy to gibe at Montfort as a foreigner or at Nelson as a cripple, as to gibe at the struggling speech and the maimed bodies of the mass of our comic and tragic race. If I shrink faintly from this affair of tourists and tombs, it is certainly not because I am so profane as to think lightly either of the tombs or the tourists. I reverence those great men who had the courage to die ; I reverence also these little men who have the courage to live.

Even if this be conceded, another suggestion may be made. It may be said that antiquities and commonplace crowds are indeed good things, like violets and geraniums ; but they do not go together. A billycock is a beautiful object (it may be eagerly urged), but it is not in the same style of architecture as Ely Cathedral ; it is a dome, a small rococo dome in the Renaissance manner, and does not go with the pointed arches that assault heaven like spears. A charabanc is lovely (it may be said) if placed upon a pedestal and worshipped for its own sweet sake ; but it does not harmonize

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

with the curve and outline of the old three-decker on which Nelson died ; its beauty is quite of another sort. Therefore (we will suppose our sage to argue) antiquity and democracy should be kept separate, as inconsistent things. Things may be inconsistent in time and space which are by no means inconsistent in essential value and idea. Thus the Catholic Church has water for the new-born and oil for the dying ; but she never mixes oil and water.

This explanation is plausible ; but I do not find it adequate. The first objection is that the same smell of bathos haunts the soul in the case of all deliberate and elaborate visits to 'beauty spots', even by persons of the most elegant position or the most protected privacy. Specially visiting the Coliseum by moonlight always struck me as being as vulgar as visiting it by limelight. One millionaire standing on the top of Mont Blanc, one millionaire standing in the desert by the Sphinx, one millionaire standing in the middle of Stonehenge, is just as comic as one millionaire is anywhere else ; and that is saying a good deal. On the other hand, if the billycock had come privately and naturally into Ely Cathedral, no enthusiast for Gothic harmony would think of objecting to the billycock—so long, of course, as it was not

worn on the head. But there is indeed a much deeper objection to this theory of the two incompatible excellences of antiquity and popularity. For the truth is that it has been almost entirely the antiquities that have normally interested the populace ; and it has been almost entirely the populace who have systematically preserved the antiquities. The Oldest Inhabitant has always been a clod-hopper ; I have never heard of his being a gentleman. It is the peasants who preserve all traditions of the sites of battles or the building of churches. It is they who remember, so far as any one remembers, the glimpses of fairies or the graver wonders of saints. In the classes above them the supernatural has been slain by the supercilious. That is a true and tremendous text in Scripture which says that ‘ where there is no vision the people perish ’. But it is equally true in practice that where there is no people the visions perish.

The idea must be abandoned, then, that this feeling of faint dislike towards popular sightseeing is due to any inherent incompatibility between the idea of special shrines and trophies and the idea of large masses of ordinary men. On the contrary, these two elements of sanctity and democracy have been specially connected and allied throughout history. The shrines and

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

trophies were often put up by ordinary men. They were always put up for ordinary men. To whatever things the fastidious modern artist may choose to apply his theory of specialist judgment, and an aristocracy of taste, he must necessarily find it difficult really to apply it to such historic and monumental art. Obviously, a public building is meant to impress the public. The most aristocratic tomb is a democratic tomb, because it exists to be seen ; the only aristocratic thing is the decaying corpse, not the undecaying marble ; and if the man wanted to be thoroughly aristocratic, he should be buried in his own back-garden. The chapel of the most narrow and exclusive sect is universal outside, even if it is limited inside ; its walls and windows confront all points of the compass and all quarters of the cosmos. It may be small as a dwelling-place, but it is universal as a monument ; if its sectarians had really wished to be private they should have met in a private house. Whenever and wherever we erect a national or municipal hall, pillar, or statue, we are speaking to the crowd like a demagogue.

The statue of every statesman offers itself for election as much as the statesman himself. Every epitaph on a church slab is put up for the mob as much as a placard in a General Election. And if we follow this track of

reflection we shall, I think, really find why it is that modern sight-seeing jars on something in us, something that is not a caddish contempt for graves nor an equally caddish contempt for cads. For, after all, there is many a churchyard which consists mostly of dead cads ; but that does not make it less sacred or less sad.

The real explanation, I fancy, is this : that these cathedrals and columns of triumph were meant, not for people more cultured and self-conscious than modern tourists, but for people much rougher and more casual. Those leaps of live stone like frozen fountains, were so placed and poised as to catch the eye of ordinary inconsiderate men going about their daily business ; and when they are so seen they are never forgotten. The true way of reviving the magic of our great minsters and historic sepulchres is not the one which Ruskin was always recommending. It is not to be more careful of historic buildings. Nay, it is rather to be more careless of them. Buy a bicycle in Maidstone to visit an aunt in Dover, and you will see Canterbury Cathedral as it was built to be seen. Go through London only as the shortest way between Croydon and Hampstead, and the Nelson Column will (for the first time in your life) remind you of Nelson. You will appreciate Hereford Cathedral if you have

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

come for cider, not if you have come for architecture. You will really see the Place Vendôme if you have come on business, not if you have come for art. For it was for the simple and laborious generations of men, practical, troubled about many things, that our fathers reared those portents. There is, indeed, another element, not unimportant : the fact that people have gone to cathedrals to pray. But in discussing modern artistic cathedral-lovers, we need not consider this.

XV. HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN

READERS of Mr. Bernard Shaw and other modern writers may be interested to know that the Superman has been found. I found him ; he lives in South Croydon. My success will be a great blow to Mr. Shaw, who has been following quite a false scent, and is now looking for the creature in Blackpool ; and as for Mr. Wells's notion of generating him out of gases in a private laboratory, I always thought it doomed to failure. I assure Mr. Wells that the Superman at Croydon was born in the ordinary way, though he himself, of course, is anything but ordinary.

Nor are his parents unworthy of the wonderful being whom they have given to the world. The name of Lady Hypatia Smythe-Browne (now Lady Hypatia Hagg) will never be forgotten in the East End, where she did such splendid social work. Her constant cry of 'Save the children !' referred to the cruel neglect of children's eyesight involved in allowing them to play with crudely painted toys. She quoted unanswerable statistics to prove that children allowed to look at violet and vermillion often suffered from failing eyesight

HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN

in their extreme old age ; and it was owing to her ceaseless crusade that the pestilence of the Monkey-on-the-Stick was almost swept from Hoxton. The devoted worker would tramp the streets untiringly, taking away the toys from all the poor children, who were often moved to tears by her kindness. Her good work was interrupted, partly by a new interest in the creed of Zoroaster, and partly by a savage blow from an umbrella. It was inflicted by a dissolute Irish apple-woman, who, on returning from some orgy to her ill-kept apartment, found Lady Hypatia in the bedroom taking down an oleograph, which, to say the least of it, could not really elevate the mind. At this the ignorant and partly intoxicated Celt dealt the social reformer a severe blow, adding to it an absurd accusation of theft. The lady's exquisitely balanced mind received a shock, and it was during a short mental illness that she married Dr. Hagg.

Of Dr. Hagg himself I hope there is no need to speak. Any one even slightly acquainted with those daring experiments in Neo-Individualist Eugenics, which are now the one absorbing interest of the English democracy, must know his name and often commend it to the personal protection of an impersonal power. Early in life he brought to bear that ruthless

insight into the history of religions which he had gained in boyhood as an electrical engineer. Later he became one of our greatest geologists ; and achieved that bold and bright outlook upon the future of Socialism which only geology can give. At first there seemed something like a rift, a faint, but perceptible, fissure, between his views and those of his aristocratic wife. For she was in favour (to use her own powerful epigram) of protecting the poor against themselves ; while he declared pitilessly, in a new and striking metaphor, that the weakest must go to the wall. Eventually, however, the married pair perceived an essential union in the unmistakably modern character of both their views ; and in this enlightening and intelligible formula their souls found peace. The result is that this union of the two highest types of our civilization, the fashionable lady and the all but vulgar medical man, has been blessed by the birth of the Superman, that being whom all the labourers in Battersea are so eagerly expecting night and day.

I found the house of Dr. and Lady Hypatia Hagg without much difficulty ; it is situated in one of the last straggling streets of Croydon, and overlooked by a line of poplars. I reached

HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN

the door towards the twilight, and it was natural that I should fancifully see something dark and monstrous in the dim bulk of that house which contained the creature who was more marvellous than the children of men. When I entered the house I was received with exquisite courtesy by Lady Hypatia and her husband ; but I found much greater difficulty in actually seeing the Superman, who is now about fifteen years old, and is kept by himself in a quiet room. Even my conversation with the father and mother did not quite clear up the character of this mysterious being. Lady Hypatia, who has a pale and poignant face, and is clad in those impalpable and pathetic greys and greens with which she has brightened so many homes in Hoxton, did not appear to talk of her offspring with any of the vulgar vanity of an ordinary human mother. I took a bold step and asked if the Superman was nice looking.

‘ He creates his own standard, you see,’ she replied, with a slight sigh. ‘ Upon that plane he is more than Apollo. Seen from our lower plane, of course——’ And she sighed again.

•I had a horrible impulse, and said suddenly, ‘ Has he got any hair ? ’

There was a long and painful silence, and then Dr. Hagg said smoothly : ‘ Everything

upon that plane is different ; what he has got is not . . . well, not, of course, what we call hair . . . but—'

'Don't you think,' said his wife, very softly, 'don't you think that really, for the sake of argument, when talking to the mere public, one might call it hair ? '

'Perhaps you are right,' said the doctor after a few moments' reflection. 'In connexion with hair like that one must speak in parables.'

'Well, what on earth is it,' I asked in some irritation, "if it isn't hair ? Is it feathers ? "

'Not feathers, as we understand feathers,' answered Hagg in an awful voice.

I got up in some irritation. 'Can I see him, at any rate ? ' I asked. 'I am a journalist, and have no earthly motives except curiosity and personal vanity. I should like to say that I had shaken hands with the Superman.'

The husband and wife had both got heavily to their feet, and stood, embarrassed.

'Well, of course, you know,' said Lady Hypatia, with the really charming smile of the aristocratic hostess. 'You know he can't exactly shake hands . . . not hands, you know. . . . The structure, of course—'

I broke out of all social bounds, and rushed at the door of the room which I thought to contain the incredible creature. I burst it

HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN

open ; the room was pitch dark. But from in front of me came a small sad yelp, and from behind me a double shriek.

‘ You have done it, now ! ’ cried Dr. Hagg, burying his bald brow in his hands. ‘ You have let in a draught on him ; and he is dead.’

As I walked away from Croydon that night I saw men in black carrying out a coffin that was not of any human shape. The wind wailed above me, whirling the poplars, so that they drooped and nodded like the plumes of some cosmic funeral. ‘ It is, indeed,’ said Dr. Hagg, ‘ the whole universe weeping over the frustration of its most magnificent birth.’ But I thought that there was a hoot of laughter in the high wail of the wind.

XVI. THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY

THERE has crept, I notice, into our literature and journalism a new way of flattering the wealthy and the great. In more straightforward times flattery itself was more straightforward ; falsehood itself was more true. A poor man wishing to please a rich man simply said that he was the wisest, bravest, tallest, strongest, most benevolent and most beautiful of mankind ; and as even the rich man probably knew that he wasn't that, the thing did the less harm. When courtiers sang the praises of a King they attributed to him things that were entirely improbable, as that he resembled the sun at noonday, that they had to shade their eyes when he entered the room, that his people could not breathe without him, or that he had with his single sword conquered Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. The safety of this method was its artificiality ; between the King and his public image there was really no relation. But the moderns have invented a much subtler and more poisonous kind of eulogy. The modern method is to take the prince or rich man, to give a credible picture of his type of personality, as that he is business-like,

THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY

or a sportsman, or fond of art, or convivial, or reserved ; and then enormously exaggerate the value and importance of these natural qualities. Those who praise Mr. Carnegie do not say that he is as wise as Solomon and as brave as Mars ; I wish they did. It would be the next most honest thing to giving their real reason for praising him, which is simply that he has money. The journalists who write about Mr. Pierpont Morgan do not say that he is as beautiful as Apollo ; I wish they did. What they do is to take the rich man's superficial life and manner, clothes, hobbies, love of cats, dislike of doctors, or what not ; and then with the assistance of this realism make the man out to be a prophet and a saviour of his kind, whereas he is merely a private and stupid man who happens to like cats or to dislike doctors. The old flatterer took for granted that the King was an ordinary man, and set to work to make him out extraordinary. The newer and cleverer flatterer takes for granted that he is extraordinary, and that therefore even ordinary things about him will be of interest.

I have noticed one very amusing way in which this is done. I notice the method applied to about six of the wealthiest men in England in a book of interviews published by an able and well-known journalist. The flatterer contrives

to combine strict truth of fact with a vast atmosphere of awe and mystery by the simple operation of dealing almost entirely in negatives. Suppose you are writing a sympathetic study of Mr. Pierpont Morgan. Perhaps there is not much to say about what he does think, or like, or admire ; but you can suggest whole vistas of his taste and philosophy by talking a great deal about what he does not think, or like, or admire. You say of him—‘ But little attracted to the most recent schools of German philosophy, he stands almost as resolutely aloof from the tendencies of transcendental Pantheism as from the narrower ecstasies of Neo-Catholicism.’ Or suppose I am called upon to praise the charwoman who has just come into my house, and who certainly deserves it much more. I say—‘ It would be a mistake to class Mrs. Higgs among the followers of Loisy ; her position is in many ways different ; nor is she wholly to be identified with the concrete Hebraism of Harnack.’ It is a splendid method, as it gives the flatterer an opportunity of talking about something else besides the subject of the flattery, and it gives the subject of the flattery a rich, if somewhat bewildered, mental glow, as of one who has somehow gone through agonies of philosophical choice of which he was previously unaware.

THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY

It is a splendid method ; but I wish it were applied sometimes to charwomen rather than only to millionaires.

There is another way of flattering important people which has become very common, I notice, among writers in the newspapers and elsewhere. It consists in applying to them the phrases ‘simple’, or ‘quiet’, or ‘modest’, without any sort of meaning or relation to the person to whom they are applied. To be simple is the best thing in the world ; to be modest is the next best thing. I am not so sure about being quiet. I am rather inclined to think that really modest people make a great deal of noise. It is quite self-evident that really simple people make a great deal of noise. But simplicity and modesty, at least, are very rare and royal human virtues, not to be lightly talked about. Few human beings, and at rare intervals, have really risen into being modest ; not one man in ten or in twenty has by long wars become simple, as an actual old soldier does by long wars become simple. These virtues are not things to fling about as mere flattery ; many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things and have not seen them. But in the description of the births, lives, and deaths of very luxurious men they are used incessantly and quite without thought.

If a journalist has to describe a great politician or financier (the things are substantially the same) entering a room or walking down a thoroughfare, he always says, 'Mr. Midas was quietly dressed in a black frock coat, a white waistcoat, and light grey trousers, with a plain green tie and simple flower in his button-hole.' As if any one would expect him to have a crimson frock coat or spangled trousers. As if any one would expect him to have a burning Catherine wheel in his button-hole.

But this process, which is absurd enough when applied to the ordinary and external lives of worldly people, becomes perfectly intolerable when it is applied, as it always is applied, to the one episode which is serious even in the lives of politicians. I mean their death. When we have been sufficiently bored with the account of the simple costume of the millionaire, which is generally about as complicated as any that he could assume without being simply thought mad ; when we have been told about the modest home of the millionaire, a home which is generally much too immodest to be called a home at all ; when we have followed him through all these unmeaning eulogies, we are always asked last of all to admire his quiet funeral. I do not know what else people think a funeral should be except

THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY

quiet. Yet again and again, over the grave of every one of those sad rich men, for whom one should surely feel, first and last, a speechless pity—over the grave of Beit, over the grave of Whiteley—this sickening nonsense about modesty and simplicity has been poured out. I well remember that when Beit was buried, the papers said that the mourning-coaches contained everybody of importance, that the floral tributes were sumptuous, splendid, intoxicating ; but, for all that, it was a simple and quiet funeral. What, in the name of Acheron, did they expect it to be ? Did they think there would be human sacrifice—the immolation of Oriental slaves upon the tomb ? Did they think that long rows of Oriental dancing-girls would sway hither and thither in an ecstasy of lament ? Did they look for the funeral games of Patroclus ? I fear they had no such splendid and pagan meaning. I fear they were only using the words ‘quiet’ and ‘modest’ as words to fill up a page—a mere piece of the automatic hypocrisy which does become too common among those who have to write rapidly and often. The word ‘modest’ will soon become like the word ‘honourable’, which is said to be employed by the Japanese before any word that occurs in a polite sentence, as ‘Put honourable umbrella in honourable

G. K. CHESTERTON

umbrella-stand' ; or 'condescend to clean honourable boots'. We shall read in the future that the modest King went out in his modest crown, clad from head to foot in modest gold and attended with his ten thousand modest earls, their swords modestly drawn. No ! if we have to pay for splendour let us praise it as splendour, not as simplicity. When next I meet a rich man I intend to walk up to him in the street and address him with Oriental hyperbole. He will probably run away.

XVII. THE METHUSELAHITE

I SAW in a newspaper paragraph the other day the following entertaining and deeply philosophical incident. A man was enlisting as a soldier at Portsmouth, and some form was put before him to be filled up, common, I suppose, to all such cases, in which was, among other things, an inquiry about what was his religion. With an equal and ceremonial gravity the man wrote down the word 'Methuselahite'. Whoever looks over such papers must, I should imagine, have seen some rum religions in his time ; unless the Army is going to the dogs. But with all his specialist knowledge he could not 'place' Methuselahism among what Bossuet called the variations of Protestantism. He felt a fervid curiosity about the tenets and tendencies of the sect ; and he asked the soldier what it meant. The soldier replied that it was his religion 'to live as long as he could'.

Now, considered as an incident in the religious history of Europe, that answer of that soldier was worth more than a hundred cart-loads of quarterly and monthly and weekly and daily papers discussing religious problems and religious books. Every day the daily paper

reviews some new philosopher who has some new religion ; and there is not in the whole two thousand words of the whole two columns one word as witty as or wise as that word ‘ Methuselahite ’. The whole meaning of literature is simply to cut a long story short ; that is why our modern books of philosophy are never literature. That soldier had in him the very soul of literature ; he was one of the great phrase-makers of modern thought, like Victor Hugo or Disraeli. He found one word that defines the paganism of to-day.

Henceforward, when the modern philosophers come to me with their new religions (and there is always a kind of queue of them waiting all the way down the street) I shall anticipate their circumlocutions and be able to cut them short with a single inspired word. One of them will begin, ‘ The New Religion, which is based upon that Primordial Energy in Nature . . . ’ ‘ Methuselahite,’ I shall say sharply ; ‘ good morning.’ ‘ Human Life,’ another will say, ‘ Human Life, the only ultimate sanctity, freed from creed and dogma . . . ’ ‘ Methuselahite ! ’ I shall yell. ‘ Out you go ! ’ ‘ My religion is the Religion of Joy,’ a third will explain (a bald old man with a cough and tinted glasses), ‘ the Religion of Physical Pride and Rapture, and my . . . ’

THE METHUSELAHITE

‘ Methuselahite ! ’ I shall cry again, and I shall slap him boisterously on the back, and he will fall down. Then a pale young poet with serpentine hair will come and say to me (as one did only the other day) : ‘ Moods and impressions are the only realities, and these are constantly and wholly changing. I could hardly therefore define my religion. . . .’ ‘ I can,’ I should say, somewhat sternly. ‘ Your religion is to live a long time ; and if you stop here a moment longer you won’t fulfil it.’

A new philosophy generally means in practice the praise of some old vice. We have had the sophist who defends cruelty, and calls it masculinity. We have had the sophist who defends profligacy, and calls it the liberty of the emotions. We have had the sophist who defends idleness, and calls it art. It will almost certainly happen—it can almost certainly be prophesied—that in this saturnalia of sophistry there will at some time or other arise a sophist who desires to idealize cowardice. And when we are once in this unhealthy world of mere wild words, what a vast deal there would be to say for cowardice ! ‘ Is not life a lovely thing and worth saving ? ’ the soldier would say as he ran away. ‘ Should I not prolong the exquisite miracle of consciousness ? ’ the householder would say as he hid under the table.

' As long as there are roses and lilies on the earth shall I not remain there ? ' would come the voice of the citizen from under the bed. It would be quite as easy to defend the coward as a kind of poet and mystic as it has been, in many recent books, to defend the emotionalist as a kind of poet and mystic, or the tyrant as a kind of poet and mystic. When that last grand sophistry and morbidity is preached in a book or on a platform, you may depend upon it there will be a great stir in its favour, that is, a great stir among the little people who live among books and platforms. There will be a new great Religion, the Religion of Methuselahism : with pomps and priests and altars. Its devout crusaders will vow themselves in thousands with a great vow to live long. But there is one comfort : they won't.

For, indeed, the weakness of this worship of mere natural life (which is a common enough creed to-day) is that it ignores the paradox of courage and fails in its own aim. As a matter of fact, no men would be killed quicker than the Methuselahites. The paradox of courage is that a man must be a little careless of his life even in order to keep it. And in the very case I have quoted we may see an example of how little the theory of Methuselahism really

THE METHUSELAHITE

inspires our best life. For there is one riddle in that case which cannot easily be cleared up. If it was the man's religion to live as long as he could, why on earth was he enlisting as a soldier?

XVIII. ON THE ENGLISHMAN ABROAD

IT was an old objection to the Englishman abroad that he made himself too much at home. He was accused of treating a first-class foreign hotel as if it were only a fourth-class English hotel ; and of brawling in it as if it were a bad variety of public-house. If there was a truth in the charge, it has since been transferred to a more vigorous type of vulgarian ; and compared with a certain sort of American traveller, the English tripper might be mistaken for a civilized man. He has even taken on the colour of his Continental surroundings ; and is indistinguishable from what he himself would once have described as ‘the natives’. It might almost be regarded as a form of going *fantee*. But there is one particular aspect of the old accusation, which seems to me much more curious and puzzling than any other. It is that when the Englishman did blunder or bully, in demanding certain things merely because they were familiar, they were not really the things that had long been familiar to him ; or to his fathers. I can understand the Englishman asking for English things ; the odd thing is that it was not for the most English

ON THE ENGLISHMAN ABROAD

things that he asked. Some of the most English things he had already lost in England, and could hardly hope to find in Europe. Most of the things he did hope to find in Europe, he had only recently found even in England. When he asked for a drink, he asked for a Scotch drink ; he even submitted to the intolerable national humiliation of calling it Scotch. When he asked for a game, he asked for a Scotch game ; he looked to see whole landscapes transformed by the game of golf ; which he himself had hardly played for ten years. He did not go about looking for cricket, which he had played for six hundred years. And just as he asked for Scotch links instead of cricket-fields and Scotch whisky instead of ale, so he expected a number of appliances and conveniences which were often much less English than American ; and sometimes much less English than German. It would perhaps be pressing the argument fantastically far to say that even tea is originally a thing as oriental as hashish. But certainly an Englishman demanding tea in all the cafés of the Continent was as unreasonable as a Chinaman demanding opium in all the public-houses of the Old Kent Road. He was at least comparable to a Frenchman roaring to have red wine included in his bill in a series of tea-shops in Tooting.

But I am not so much complaining of the old-fashioned Englishman who asked for something like the 'five o'clock' which was recognized as English. I am rather complaining of a new-fashioned Englishman who would insist on American ice-cream sodas in the plains of Russia, while refusing tea because it was taken with lemon or served in a samovar. This bizarre contradiction and combination of the blind acceptance of some foreign things and the blind refusal of others, does seem to me a mystery to be added to what is perhaps the most mysterious national character in Christendom. That a man from Market Harborough should miss the oldest things in Old England, when travelling in Lithuania, may be intelligible and pardonable enough. That a man from Market Harborough should miss the newest things in New York, and be seriously surprised not to find them among Lithuanian peasants, is even more extraordinary than that he should want them himself.

But there goes along with this English eccentricity an even more serious English error. The things of which England has most reason to be proud are the things which England has preserved out of the ancient culture of the Christian world, when all the rest of that world has neglected them. They are at once unique and

universal triumphs and trophies of the national life. They are things that are English in the sense that the English have kept them ; but human in the sense that all humanity ought to have kept them. They are European in the sense of really belonging to the whole white civilization ; they are English in the sense of having been largely lost in Europe. And I have heard Englishmen boasting of all sorts of absurd things, from the possession of German blood to the possession of Jewish politicians ; and I have never heard a single Englishman say a single word about a single one of these really English things.

One obvious case, for example, is that of having a fire in the old Latin sense of a focus. The idea of the hearth is one to be found in ancient Roman culture, and therefore in all the European cultures that have come from it. The idea of the hearth is to be found everywhere ; but the hearth is not to be found everywhere. It is now most easily and universally to be found in England. And it is a strange irony that the French poet or the Italian orator, full of the splendours of the great pagan past, naturally speaks of a man fighting for his hearth and his altar ; when he himself in practice has as much neglected hearths as we have neglected altars. And the only man in Christendom who

really retains a hearth is one who has unfortunately rather dropped out of the habit of fighting for it. I do not mean, of course, that there are not really firesides scattered everywhere throughout Europe, especially among the poor, who always retain the highest and proudest traditions of the past. I am talking of a matter of proportion ; of the preponderating presence of the custom in one place rather than another ; and in this sense it is certain that it preponderates in England more than in any other country. Almost everywhere else the much more artificial and prosaic institution called the stove has become solidly established. In every eternal and essential sense, there is simply no comparison between that open domestic altar, on which the visible flame dances and illuminates, and the mere material habit of shutting up heat in a big box. The comparison is as sharp as that between the wild but splendid pagan custom of burning a dead man on a tower of timber, so that he went up to the sky in a column of fire and cloud, and the paltry paganism of our own time, which is content with the thing called cremation. Similarly there is about the stove all the essential utilitarian ugliness of the oven. There must always be something more magnificent about an open furnace, even from the stand-

ON THE ENGLISHMAN ABROAD

point of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Theirs was perhaps a rather heroic form of affection for the fireside. But, in comparison, we can all feel that there is something cold and desolate about the condition of the unhappy foreigner, who cannot really hope to sit in the glow of a fireside except by the extreme experiment of setting his house on fire.

Now I appeal to all those who have sung a hundred English songs, heard a hundred English speeches, read a hundred English books of more or less breezy or bombastic patriotism, to say whether they have ever seen the continuity of this Christian custom properly praised as a matter of pride among the English. And this strange gap in our glory seems to me another example of something that I noted recently in this place ; the dangerous lack of an intensive national feeling in this country ; and above all a much too supine surrender to other influences ; from Germany ; from Scotland ; and above all from America.

I have taken only one domestic detail here, for the sake of clearness ; but of course the principle could be extended to any number of larger examples of the same truth. The English inn, although a most Christian institution, was something more than an institution of Christendom. It was in its day a thing very

specially English. I say it was ; for I very much fear that capitalist monopoly and prohibitionist madness have between them turned it into something historical. It may be that the public-house will soon be dead enough to become a glorious historical monument. But the point to be noted here is the comparison with other countries, which had similar institutions, yet never had exactly the same institution. Sometimes, as in the case of the open hearth or fireside, they really had the same institution ; and yet never had it so long. But any one travelling in foreign countries can note that the new things are not erected on the basis of this particular old thing. We have spoilt the English inn ; but at least we had it to spoil ; and many national traditions, admirable in other ways, have had something much less admirable to spoil. In Europe, especially in outlying parts of Europe, we may see the latest modern machinery introduced without any of that intermediate type of comfort and convenience. The new American barbarism is applied direct to the oldest European barbarism. That interlude of moderate and mellow civilization has never been known. Men of many countries, both new and old, could only see it by coming to England ; and even then they might come too late. The English might have

ON THE ENGLISHMAN ABROAD

already destroyed the last glories of England. When I think of these things, I still stand astounded at the strange quality of my countrymen ; at their arrogance and especially at their modesty.

XIX. ON CHANGE

A PROFESSOR, filled with the spirit, has delivered an oracle on the subject of The Future. I do not know what he was a professor of, but I suppose he was a Professor of Prophecy. Anyhow, he belonged to that band of enthusiasts for evolution who seem to know much more about the future than they do about the past or even the present. For he was quite as scornful of the present as of the past. We are still, he said, only half-baked savages. Anyhow, some of us are still rather half-baked philosophers ; and no philosopher of this school has ever yet answered the question that must have been put again and again, and which I, for one, have often put. If everything changes, including the mind of man, how can we tell whether any change is an improvement or no ?

To take a simple and even crude example. One evolutionist, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, will say he has evolved a higher morality by refusing to eat the flesh of animals ; but he does so because he has retained the old ideal of pity. Another evolutionist might just as well say that he had evolved a larger morality in being free to eat the flesh of human beings ; though even

ON CHANGE

in talking of being free he would still appeal to the old ideal of liberty. But he could easily talk, in quite a modern manner, about the ancient horror of cannibalism being a mere prejudice, a tribal taboo, an irrational limitation of human experience. The professor's own phrase will be found charmingly apt. He complains that we are still half-baked savages. He may well look forward to the happy day when we shall be completely baked savages.

Now, nobody can possibly say which of these two evolutionary changes is the better, unless he keeps some standard that cannot be changed. He cannot tell whether he ought to evolve into the higher morality or into the larger morality, unless he has some principle of pity or of liberty that does not evolve at all. The professor gave, among his rather random examples, the suggestion that we must be changing for the better because women were burned three hundred years ago. Suppose I tell him that women will be vivisected three hundred years hence. I have as much right to tell him that as he has to tell me anything else ; I also can roll myself in the prophet's mantle ; I also can mount the tripod and deliver the oracle. In other words, I know as much about the future as he does, or as anybody else does ; which is nothing at all. But

suppose it were true, as it is most certainly tenable, that some of the vivisectionists do eventually propose to extend vivisection from beasts to men ; just as I have pictured the intellectuals of the New Cannibalism extending their diet from beasts to men. It will be just as easy to use a scientific jargon in defence of that vivisection as of any other vivisection. It will be just as easy to argue, as men in all ages have argued, that a minority must suffer for the sake of a community, or that such sacrifice is a sort of martyrdom for mankind. What I want to know is, how is the evolutionist to tell whether this is a forward step or a retrograde step, if his ethics are always changing with his evolution ? The Vivisectionists will say then, as they say now, that true progress demands a painful but necessary investigation. The Anti-Vivisectionists will say then, as they say now, that true progress is found in increased sensibility to suffering and renunciation of force. But how is the unhappy doubter to decide which of these two versions of true progress is really true ? He can only do it if he has the test of some truth that remains true. But it is the very essence of this extreme evolutionary notion of thought that no truth can really remain true. The mind is fluid and changing, as the body is fluid and changing. On this

ON CHANGE

principle we may be able to say of the future that it will be a change. But we cannot say it will be an improvement ; for that implies that there will always be something in common between us and our descendants ; something that we are all trying to improve. Why should that something not change like everything ? Is that outside the laws of evolution ? Is that a special creation ? Is that a miracle ? Is that common standard of conscience a thing of divine origin ? Dreadful thought !

I need not say much here of the actual prophecies of the professor. They sound very like a skit or burlesque on the romances of Jules Verne or the earlier romances of H. G. Wells. Only they contain absurdities that nobody would put into a romance, or even into a burlesque. The professor was, of course, bursting with hope and progressive optimism. He thinks that everything is going very well indeed, and the world improving with wonderful rapidity. As an example of this, he says that men are losing their eyes, teeth, hair, and sense of hearing with a rapidity that raises the happiest anticipations in a humane lover of his kind. He explained that when we have got rid of all these rude and extinct organs, we should have mechanical scientific substitutes. In the simple language of our fathers, we shall

G. K. CHESTERTON

have false hair, false teeth, false eyes, false ears, and everything else suitable to our false philosophy. He did not explain how soon it will be possible to manufacture that minor part of the machinery which has hitherto escaped so many inquiring mechanics ; I mean the little thing that actually sees, hears, smells, speaks, and thinks. For, strange and exasperating as it seems without that one little thing (which nobody can find anywhere) it will generally be found that telescopes cannot see by themselves, telephones cannot hear by themselves, books cannot write themselves or read themselves ; and a man cannot even talk entirely without thinking. Though he sometimes comes pretty near it.

XX. A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY

OWN somewhere far off in the shallow dales of Hertfordshire there lies a village of great beauty, and I doubt not of admirable virtue, but of eccentric and unbalanced literary taste, which asked the present writer to come down to it on Sunday afternoon and give an address. Now it was very difficult to get down to it at all on Sunday afternoon, owing to the indescribable state into which our national laws and customs have fallen in connexion with the seventh day. It is not Puritanism ; it is simply anarchy. I should have some sympathy with the Jewish Sabbath, if it were a Jewish Sabbath, and that for three reasons. First, that religion is an intrinsically sympathetic thing ; second, that I cannot conceive any religion worth calling a religion without fixed and material observances ; and third, that the particular observance of sitting still and doing no work is one that suits my temperament down to the ground.

But the absurdity of the modern English convention is that it does not let a man sit still ; it only perpetually trips him up when it has forced him to walk about. Our Sabbatarianism does

not forbid us to ask a man in Battersea to come and talk in Hertfordshire ; it only prevents his getting there. I can understand that a deity might be worshipped with joys, with flowers, and fireworks in the old European style. I can understand that a deity might be worshipped with sorrows. But I cannot imagine any deity being worshipped with inconveniences. Let the good Moslem go to Mecca, or let him abide in his tent, according to his feeling for religious symbols. But surely Allah cannot see anything particularly dignified in his servant being misled by the time-table, finding that the old Mecca express is not running, missing his connection at Bagdad, or having to wait three hours in a small side station outside Damascus.

So it was with me on this occasion. I found there was no telegraph service at all to this place ; I found there was only one weak thread of train-service. Now if this had been the authority of real English religion, I should have submitted to it at once. If I believed that the telegraph clerk could not send the telegram because he was at that moment rigid in an ecstasy of prayer, I should think all telegrams unimportant in comparison. If I could believe that railway porters when relieved from their duties rushed with passion to the nearest place of worship, I should say that all lectures and

A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY

everything else ought to give way to such a consideration. I should not complain if the national faith forbade me to make any appointments of labour or self-expression on the Sabbath. But, as it is, it only tells me that I may very probably keep the Sabbath by not keeping the appointment.

.

But I must resume the sad details of my tale. I found that there was only one train in the whole of that Sunday by which I could even get within several hours or several miles of the time or place. I therefore went to the telephone, which is one of my favourite toys, and down which I have shouted many valuable, but prematurely arrested, monologues upon art and morals. I remember a mild shock of surprise when I discovered that one could use the telephone on Sunday ; I did not expect it to be cut off, but I expected it to buzz more than on ordinary days, to the advancement of our national religion. Through this instrument, in fewer words than usual, and with a comparative economy of epigram, I ordered a taxi-cab to take me to the railway station. I have not a word to say in general either against telephones or taxi-cabs ; they seem to me two of the purest and most poetic of the creations of modern

civilization. Unfortunately, when the taxi-cab started, it did exactly what modern scientific civilization has done—it broke down. The result of this was that when I arrived at King's Cross my only train was gone ; there was a Sabbath calm in the station, a calm in the eyes of the porters, and in my breast, if calm at all, if any calm, a calm despair.

There was not, however, very much calm of any sort in my breast on first making the discovery ; and it was turned to blinding horror when I learnt that I could not even send a telegram to the organizers of the meeting. To leave my entertainers in the lurch was sufficiently exasperating ; to leave them without any intimation was simply low. I reasoned with the official. I said : ' Do you really mean to say that if my brother were dying and my mother in this place, I could not communicate with her ? ' He was a man of literal and laborious mind ; he asked me if my brother was dying. I answered that he was in excellent and even offensive health, but that I was inquiring upon a question of principle. What would happen if England were invaded, or if I alone knew how to turn aside a comet or an earthquake ? He waved away these hypotheses in the most irresponsible spirit, but he was quite certain that telegrams could not reach this

A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY

particular village. Then something exploded in me ; that element of the outrageous which is the mother of all adventures sprang up ungovernable, and I decided that I would not be a cad merely because some of my remote ancestors had been Calvinists. I would keep my appointment if I lost all my money and all my wits. I went out into the quiet London street, where my quiet London cab was still waiting for its fare in the cold and misty morning. I placed myself comfortably in the London cab and told the London driver to drive me to the other end of Hertfordshire. And he did.

.

I shall not forget that drive. It was doubtful whether, even in a motor-cab, the thing was possible with any consideration for the driver, not to speak of some slight consideration for the people in the road. I urged the driver to eat and drink something before he started, but he said (with I know not what pride of profession or delicate sense of adventure) that he would rather do it when we arrived—if we ever did. I was by no means so refined ; I bought a varied selection of pork-pies at a little shop that was open (why was that shop open ?—it is all a mystery), and ate them as we went along. The beginning was sombre and irritating. I

was annoyed, not with people, but with things, like a baby ; with the motor for breaking down and with Sunday for being Sunday. And the sight of the northern slums expanded and ennobled, but did not decrease, my gloom : Whitechapel has an Oriental gaudiness in its squalor ; Battersea and Camberwell have an indescribable bustle of democracy ; but the poor parts of North London . . . well, perhaps I saw them wrongly under that ashen morning and on that foolish errand.

It was one of those days which more than once this year broke the retreat of winter ; a winter day that began too late to be spring. We were already clear of the obstructing crowds, and quickening our pace through a borderland of market gardens and isolated public-houses, when the grey showed golden patches and a good light began to glitter on everything. The cab went quicker and quicker. The open land whirled wider and wider ; but I did not lose that sense of being battled with and thwarted that I had felt in the thronged slums. Rather the feeling increased, because of the great difficulty of space and time. The faster went the car, the fiercer and thicker I felt the fight.

The whole landscape seemed charging at me—and just missing me. The tall, shining grass went by like showers of arrows ; the very

A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY

trees seemed like lances hurled at my heart, and shaving it by a hair's breadth. Across some vast, smooth valley I saw a beech-tree by the white road stand up little and defiant. It grew bigger and bigger with blinding rapidity. It charged me like a tilting knight, seemed to hack at my head, and pass by. Sometimes, when we went round a curve of road, the effect was yet more awful. It seemed as if some tree or windmill swung round to smite like a boomerang. The sun by this time was a blazing fact ; and I saw that all Nature is chivalrous and militant. We do wrong to seek peace in Nature ; we should rather seek the nobler sort of war ; and see all the trees as green banners.

I made my speech, arriving just when everybody was deciding to leave. When my cab came reeling into the market-place they decided, with evident disappointment to remain. Over the lecture I draw a veil. When I came back home I was called to the telephone, and a meek voice expressed regret for the failure of the motor-cab, and even said something about any reasonable payment. 'Payment !' I cried down the telephone. 'Whom can I pay for my own superb experience? What is the usual charge for seeing the clouds

G. K. CHESTERTON

shattered by the sun? What is the market price of a tree blue on the sky-line and then blinding white in the sun? Mention your price for that windmill that stood behind the holly-hocks in the garden. Let me pay you for . . . ? Here it was, I think, that we were cut off.

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



126 249

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY